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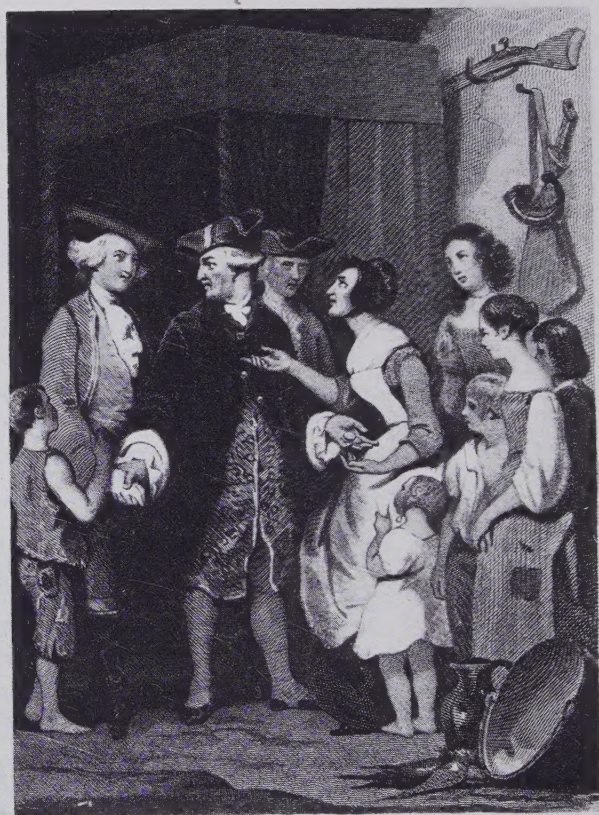


Fielding the Novelist



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THE ETERNAL CONTRAST
(*Tom Jones*, Book III, Chapter IX)

FIELDING

the Novelist

A STUDY
IN HISTORICAL CRITICISM

BY

Frederic T. Blanchard

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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To My Wife

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Preface

I have always had a strong and irresistible curiosity to discover what opinions were entertained on the first appearance of works which afterwards acquired the greatest celebrity, and have generally found that this celebrity has been of gradual and slow growth.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR*

THIS is a study of Henry Fielding's fame as a novelist and of the impress which his original genius has made upon the minds and hearts of English readers. As the years pass, the author of *Tom Jones* becomes an increasingly important figure in the history of British fiction; for it was he, more than any other, who either worked out or suggested the patterns which have been followed ever since his day. But though the statement has become a commonplace that his influence upon the novel has been immense, a detailed examination of *dicta* concerning his art and accomplishment has not up to this time appeared. In those chapters in his life of the novelist which deal with defamers and apologists, Professor Cross has removed for good and all, let us hope, the shadows which have obscured Fielding the Man; moreover, he has incorporated in his work a fuller treatment of the author's critics than had hitherto been attempted. But it was not within the scope of his design, as he says in his preface, to treat at length of the "opinions which have been passed upon Fielding's novels." Such is the purpose of the following investigation. Busying itself with what has been said, from year to year, of the novelist's work, it reveals kinships and antipathies which throw a light not merely upon Fielding's genius

* *Charles James Fox* (edited by Stephen Wheeler), London, 1907, p. 143.

and achievement but upon the development of the *genre* of realism which he founded and of which he may be regarded as perhaps the most distinguished representative in his own country.

A word or two may not be out of place here concerning the method which has been attempted in this study. Anyone who examines a considerable number of critical utterances soon discovers that much which passes under the name of historical criticism is insufficiently documented—is, too often, nothing more than a collection of illustrative material. But in tracing the course of opinion it is not enough to assemble, without further inspection, the purple passages of the most eminent writers of a period; for literary *dicta* are notably dependent upon the circumstances under which they are uttered. First of all, *When* was the pronouncement made? Since critics follow like the proverbial sheep, chronology is of prime importance. Was the assertion made carelessly, or was it thoughtfully pondered? Was it deflected by personal malice, by ethical or religious predilections, by partisanship for a competitor in the art, by lack of experience, by undue submissiveness to the lords of criticism, by mere whim or perversity? Did the critic say one thing in his youth and another in his maturity? Did he read the books or did he take his judgments ready-made? Thus is the skein of criticism woefully perplexed. But in the case of important *dicta*, such questions as these, hopeless as they are of a perfect solution, must be as far as possible taken into account. It may be predicted, indeed, that the historical criticism of the future will be more careful in its inquisition into matters of this nature than it has been in the past. So great, as a rule, has been the deference to authority, that the attendant circumstances which have influenced the truth of a famous assertion by some acknowledged great judge should be earnestly considered in estimating a man's true worth.

Moreover, pains should be taken not to give a wrong im-

pression by wrenching a criticism from its context, by ignoring other and perhaps contradictory opinions of the same author, or by neglecting the *comparative* worth of the *dictum* by disregarding what the writer of it has said concerning the work of a rival in the same department. Finally, new points of view, afforded by the vogue of a new *genre*, must successively be reckoned with. Such considerations as these, however imperfect may be the result, I have had constantly in mind during the years in which I have been engaged upon this research, the object of which has been to trace, period by period, the estimation in which Fielding has been held as a novelist since the appearance of *Joseph Andrews*, and to point out the main influences—social, literary, individual—which have played a part in the assessment of his genius and achievement.

It is hoped that an account of the many utterances regarding this great man may aid in exposing as well as in recording some of the vagaries of criticism, and in selecting and emphasizing those qualities of his mind and art which in the light of past experience appear to be most characteristic. From this investigation it will be seen that notwithstanding an exceptional amount and variety of opposition and misapprehension, Fielding's importance in English literary history, as shown by the number and zeal of his admirers as well as by the concessions of his most eminent detractors, is far greater than has been hitherto recorded.

To mention by name the friends to whom I have been indebted for advice or suggestions, as well as the libraries and private collections which have been ransacked for materials for this book, would be, of course, impossible. But it is even more impossible for me to remain entirely silent. To the librarians of Yale, Harvard, California, the British Museum, and the Huntington Library, my thanks are due for many special favors. To Mr. Frederick S. Dickson, who by the gift of his Fielding Collection to Yale University made scholarly

study of the novelist possible in this country, I am beholden for an exceptional kindness: when this work was nearly completed he generously allowed me to check my bibliography with his. To Professor Chauncey B. Tinker of Yale University I desire to express my thanks for helpful references. To Professor Charles Mills Gayley of the University of California, who has read the manuscript, I acknowledge with pleasure, as former student and sometime colleague, a particular obligation. To Professor Wilbur Lucius Cross, Dean of the Graduate School at Yale, under whom I first became interested in the Eighteenth Century, I owe a debt of gratitude for guidance, shrewd counsel, and personal friendship extending over many years. But my greatest debt is to my wife, who has worked beside me, in library stacks as well as in the study, from the beginning, and whose actual labor, keen criticism, and loving inspiration could be adequately described only by the pen of Henry Fielding himself.

FREDERIC THOMAS BLANCHARD.

*Los Angeles, California,
November 1, 1925.*

Fielding the Novelist

CHAPTER I

Joseph Andrews: The Reception of Fielding's First Novel

1742-1749

RARELY is it given a man to see the follies and vices of his own age through the eyes of succeeding generations. Nor is the ability to do this always of much material advantage to the possessor, its reward being too often simply malevolence and injurious treatment. Such in brief was the fate of the novelist Henry Fielding, whose genius—in its trend and altitude largely obscured to his contemporaries—has only within the last few decades been adequately shown in its fuller significance. There can be little doubt that by most critics of the past thirty years Fielding has been accorded higher rank as a novelist than Richardson; even those who have defended the author of *Clarissa* most valiantly have been compelled to admit that the odds have been against them. Yet in Fielding's own day the exact opposite was the case. Richardson, the prose phenomenon of the age, was mentioned—for profundity—in the same breath with Shakespeare; while at the very end of the century the pathetic power in *Sir Charles Grandison* was thought by so able a scholar as Joseph Warton to compare favorably with that of *Lear*. In view of this extraordinary *bouleversement* of opinion, we must keep in mind, to understand the attitude of contemporaries toward Fielding, their attitude toward Richardson as well.

When *Joseph Andrews* came out, during the month of February, 1742, Richardson's *Pamela*, first published in November, 1740, was still a nine-days' wonder. Four editions had appeared in swift succession—November, February, March,

and May; even before the second edition *The Gentleman's Magazine* declared that it was "judged in Town as great a Sign of Want of Curiosity not to have read Pamela, as not to have seen the French and Italian Dancers."¹ Fine ladies at a public assembly, according to Mrs. Barbauld, held up the volumes to one another to show that they were in possession of this popular novel; and Dr. Slocock, the Chaplain of St. Saviour's in Southwark, earnestly recommended the book to his congregation *from the pulpit*. Richardson himself, as Austin Dobson has pointed out, subsequently appended a note to one of the MSS. now at South Kensington which read as follows: "The Publication of the History of Pamela gave Birth to no less than 16 Pieces, as Remarks, Imitations, Retailings of the Story, Pyracies, etc. etc."² An exhibition of Pamela in Wax Work, tickets "Sixpence each" (according to *The Daily Advertiser*, April 23, 1745), made its appearance not far from Richardson's own door.

The furor over *Pamela* in the year 1741 is evidenced not merely by the praise but also by the opposition which the story evoked. According to one of the notable pamphlets against the book, called *Pamela Censured*, which, like the more famous *Shamela*, appeared after the third edition, "both the *Pulpit* and the *Press*" had "joined" in extolling *Pamela* as "the most perfect Piece of the Kind" ever published. Yet the heroine of Richardson's novel in the opinion of the ironical author of the pamphlet "instead of being artless and innocent" sets out at first with as much knowledge "of the Arts of the Town" as if she had been "born and bred" in Covent Garden "all her Life Time." To him Marivaux's *Le Paysan Parvenu* recently translated into English was somewhat "more modest" as to "title," and was "as much calculated for the Encouragement of Virtue." He addresses by name "the Rev. Dr. Slocock, Chaplain of St. Saviour's," and severely takes him to task for his action

¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XI, 56 (January, 1741).

² Dobson, A., *Samuel Richardson*, London, 1902, p. 47.

in recommending such a book as *Pamela* "from the most solemn Place."³

Compared with *Shamela*,⁴ however, *Pamela Censured* is of little historical interest. It was *Shamela* which made Richardson wince; and, as he believed it to be the work of Henry Fielding, he referred to it with especial bitterness after his rival had become famous. The question has long been debated as to whether Fielding really *did* write *Shamela*, but the chances are he did. In view of considerable positive evidence, Mr. J. Paul de Castro⁵ has attributed it to him, and Professor Cross, discussing the matter at length in his recent biography,⁶ has placed it in the list of Fielding's works. Whoever wrote it, most critics nowadays regard the pamphlet as a deserved exposé of the morbidity of Richardson's first novel. The main point with which we are now concerned is that *Pamela Censured* and *Shamela* were both called forth by the great vogue of the book which they ridiculed, and that *Joseph Andrews* is another evidence of that popularity.

Richardson, then, by the success of *Pamela* had become a shining light in the literary sky. On the other hand, when *Joseph Andrews* appeared Fielding was by no means unknown. His labors as a dramatist had brought him before the public for over a decade; even those who had paid little attention in general to his dramas had laughed over the Noodle and Doodle of his *Tom Thumb* or had taken sides for or against him in the political plays, *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*. Moreover, the onslaughts of the "sharp family of the Vinegars," in Fielding's newspaper, *The Champion*, to which he had contributed until June, 1741, had been looked forward to every week by both foe and friend. Furthermore, Jonathan Swift,⁷

³ *Pamela Censured*, London, 1741, Dedication, p. 7.

⁴ *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, London, 1741.

⁵ *Notes and Queries*, 12 S., I, 24-26 (January 8, 1916).

⁶ Cross, W. L., *The History of Henry Fielding*, New Haven, 1918, I, 304-313. See also Digeon, A., *Les Romans de Fielding*, Paris, 1923, pp. 63-69.

⁷ Swift, J., *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*, Dublin, n.d. [1733]. For an account of this matter, see Cross, I, 87-88.

one of the commanding literary figures of the age, had taken a fling at him in his *Rapsody* (though afterwards, perceiving more clearly the ironical intent of Fielding's bathos, he made his line read the "Laureate" [*i.e.*, Cibber] instead of "Fielding"); and Cibber himself, in return for Fielding's well-deserved ridicule, had in his celebrated *Apology* (1740) maligned him as a "broken Wit" and a corrupt party writer.

At the time of the appearance of *Joseph Andrews* Fielding was unquestionably well known in dramatic and journalistic circles; but it is clear that his reputation was such as to militate *a priori* against a true appreciation of his splendid new achievement in the department of fiction. His enemies, particularly his political enemies, had already pursued him with an acrimony even in those hard-hitting days exceptional. Because of this constant abuse it is probable that not merely those who were against him but also those who inclined toward him found it difficult to realize that the author of *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* and *The Grub-Street Opera* was initiating in *Joseph Andrews* a new and very significant *genre* of literature. To them Fielding was a writer of farces, burlesques, and political satires—to his friends, a wit; to his enemies, a buffoon or worse. A needy young barrister struggling for a foothold; a witty and rather successful dramatist whose career as a satirical playwright had been cut short by an act of parliament (1737); a slashing political journalist, who had been bespattered by his opponents—such was Henry Fielding when, in February, 1742, there appeared, to use Richardson's words, the "lewd and ungenerous engraftment" upon the much-vaunted *Pamela*, still the book of the hour.

The most striking fact about the immediate reception of *Joseph Andrews* is the paucity of reference to it by those from whom comment might have been expected. Almost the only notable criticism *made in the year 1742* which Fielding's biographers have been able to unearth is the very famous one by the poet Gray, then a young man of twenty-six; and almost the only notable enthusiast who has been brought forward is Gray's friend, young Richard West. There are other critics and criti-

cisms, as will presently be shown, and *Joseph Andrews* was, then and later, widely read; but this fact of the fewness of allusions to the novel by literary persons must be regarded as a significant one, particularly when we take into account the triumph at home and abroad of Richardson's *Pamela*.

/ Gray's pronouncement, hackneyed as it is to us now, is sufficiently typical and should be given in full. At the earnest solicitation of Richard West, he bestowed a reading upon *Joseph Andrews* and made the following reply (April, 1742): "I have myself, upon your recommendation, been reading Joseph Andrews. The incidents are ill laid and without invention; but the characters have a great deal of nature, which always pleases even in her lowest shapes. Parson Adams is perfectly well; so is Mrs. Slipslop, and the story of Wilson; and throughout he shews himself well read in Stage-Coaches, Country Squires, Inns, and Inns of Court. His reflections upon high people and low people, and misses and masters, are very good. However the exaltedness of some minds (or rather as I shrewdly suspect their insipidity and want of feeling or observation) may make them insensible to these light things, (I mean such as characterize and paint nature) yet surely they are as weighty and much more useful than your grave discourses upon the mind, the passions, and what not." Still, in spite of his defense of such "light things" as realistic novels, it was not to *Joseph Andrews* that Gray would turn for his highest enjoyment in the matter of fiction. "As the paradisaical pleasures of the Mahometans," he goes on to say, "consist in playing upon the flute and lying with the Houris, be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon."⁸ It is not strange, as we shall see later, that Gray, who thus exalts the French sentimentalists, was much pleased with Dr. Johnson's disparagement of *Tom Jones* as superficial. Richard West, who had recommended *Joseph Andrews* to Gray, was somewhat surprised at his friend's preference. "I rejoice," he replied, that "you

⁸ *The Poems of Mr. Gray*, edited by W. Mason, York, 1775, pp. 138-139.

found amusement in Joseph Andrews. But then I think your conceptions of Paradise a little upon the Bergerac [*i.e.*, the extravagant].”⁹

Though there have been modern critics to whom Gray’s assessment of *Joseph Andrews* has seemed perfectly adequate, they themselves would be the first to admit that this has not been the usual modern view. Professor Saintsbury has frequently alluded to Gray’s *dictum*, sometimes endeavoring to palliate or explain it, at other times castigating its author for his apathy, but always dissenting from so “amazingly patronising a verdict,” which, in his opinion, was “doubtless flavored by youth and literary superfineness.” A generation ago Austin Dobson declared “that any reader who should nowadays [1883] contrast the sickly and sordid intrigue of the *Paysan Parvenu* with the healthy animalism of *Joseph Andrews* would greatly prefer the latter”;¹⁰ and more than once since that time he has spoken of Gray’s criticism as unsympathetic. One can imagine with what surprise Gray himself would read the admiring references to Parson Adams by Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt; or, to come down to our own day, the statement of Sir Edmund Gosse that the “bustle and intrigue” of “the purest comedy” set Fielding’s first novel ablaze “with light” like a play of Shakespeare.

And yet, compared with Shenstone, Gray was positively enthusiastic. Shenstone’s letter to Richard Graves (dated “1743” but probably¹¹ written in 1742) may be allowed to speak for itself. “Indeed, as to the little parody you send, it would fix your reputation with men of sense as much as (greatly more than) the whole tedious character of Parson Adams. I read it [*Joseph Andrews*] half a year ago; . . . but made Mr. Shuckburgh take it again, imagining it altogether a very mean performance.—I liked a tenth part pretty well; but, as Dryden says of Horace (unjustly), he shews his teeth without laugh-

⁹ *The Poems of Mr. Gray*, edited by W. Mason, p. 144.

¹⁰ Dobson’s *Fielding*, London, 1883, p. 87.

¹¹ Wells, J. E., “The Dating of Shenstone’s Letters,” in *Anglia*, xxiii, N.F., p. 442.



Rowlandson Inv. et Fecit.

Published as the Act directs by J. W. Stoddard, 1792.

PARSON ADAMS AND FANNY BEFORE THE JUSTICE
(*Joseph Andrews, Book II, Chapter XI*)

ing: the greater part is *unnatural* and *unhumorous*. It has some advocates; but, I observe, those not such as I ever esteemed tasters. Finally, what makes *you* endeavour to like it?"¹² Some impress on Shenstone's memory was made by Parson Adams, however, as we learn from the correspondence of his friend, Lady Luxborough; after she had read the first four volumes of *Tom Jones* she wrote the poet, "I think as you do, that no one character yet is near so striking as Adams's in the author's other composition."¹³ But, though Shenstone apologized to Lady Luxborough for his delay in returning *Tom Jones*, he never seems to have been an enthusiast for Fielding; as we shall see later, Richardson was more to his taste. When—a quarter-century afterwards—Shenstone's friend, Richard Graves, published a novel of his own, *The Spiritual Quixote* (1772), he went out of his way in his preface¹⁴ to pay a compliment to Richardson; of Fielding, despite the fact that he had known more or less about the novelist in the old days at Ralph Allen's, there is in the preface nothing at all, though during the course of the story he refers to the thrust (in *Tom Jones*) at the Methodist landlady. To return to the year 1743, young Graves, it is to be noted, was *at that time* sufficiently well disposed toward *Joseph Andrews* to evoke a remonstrance from his friend Shenstone, who, while disparaging the book, commended *Pamela* (despite his playful letter written to Jago "in the Manner" of that novel)¹⁵ for "some nice natural strokes."

Joseph Andrews, it may be imagined, was not quite elegant enough to please either the fastidious Thomas Gray or the finical master of the Leasowes. And though both poets, still in their twenties, were rather exacting young gentlemen, their

¹² *The Works . . . of . . . William Shenstone*, second ed., London, 1769, III, 70-71.

¹³ *Letters Written by . . . Lady Luxborough to William Shenstone*, London, 1775, p. 88, Letter XXVI (March 23, 1748-1749).

¹⁴ It is only fair to say that Graves puts his preface in the mouth of "a clergyman."

¹⁵ *The Works . . . of . . . William Shenstone*, second ed., III, 4-6.

lukewarmness may be regarded as an attitude by no means at that time uncommon. When we turn to the correspondence of other literary persons of the day we find a notable lack of reference to Fielding's new venture in the way of fiction. Lady Mary did not read *Joseph Andrews* until after *Tom Jones*; and though this fact may perhaps be accounted for by the difficulty with which persons on the continent received books from England during the war, an extraordinary success on the part of her cousin would hardly have escaped comment in her letters. No reference to *Joseph Andrews* is to be found in her published correspondence until after the appearance of *Tom Jones*; then—from a recent perusal of both novels—she said, "I think Joseph Andrews better than his Foundling." Apparently she afterwards changed her mind; for, according to her granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, she wrote in her copy of *Tom Jones* the words, "*Ne plus ultra*."¹⁶ As a matter of fact, Lady Mary herself attributes her liking for *Joseph Andrews* mainly to the circumstance that she once had just such a maid-servant as Fanny in her own household.

Then there is Horace Walpole, who—enemy as he was—could not forbear referring (in 1749) to the popularity of *Tom Jones*. Though he disparaged Richardson he admitted, sarcastically, in an early letter, the triumph enjoyed by *Pamela*. "I can send you no news," he wrote, "the late singular novel is the universal and only theme—*Pamela* is like snow, she covers every thing with her whiteness."¹⁷ We look in vain, however, in the published correspondence of Walpole for any reference to *Joseph Andrews* in the letters written by him before the appearance of *Tom Jones*.

Lord Chesterfield, who had spoken against the Licensing Act (though he scored *Pasquin*, perhaps ironically, for indecency), discussed *Pamela* at length with Cr billon fils, and, later, despite certain strictures, allowed Richardson "great knowledge and skill both in painting and in interesting the

¹⁶ *Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, London, n.d. [1861], II, 186.

¹⁷ *Letters of Anna Seward*, Edinburgh, 1811, V, 431.

heart."¹⁸ Yet of *Joseph Andrews* there is in his published correspondence never a word.

Nor have we anything from Pope. On November 17, 1742, Richardson referred (in a letter to Warburton) to the praise which had been bestowed upon *Pamela* by "the first Genius of the Age"¹⁹ [*i.e.*, Pope]; and Warburton in his reply (December 28, 1742) speaks of discussing *Pamela* with Pope, who "agreed, that one excellent subject of Pamela's letters in high life, would have been to have passed her judgment, on first stepping into it, on everything she saw there." What, we may ask, prevented "the first Genius of the Age" from writing of *Joseph Andrews*? That Pope in spite of by-gone ill feeling was friendly toward Fielding at the time of the publication of that novel has more than once been remarked upon. *The New Dunciad*, as Professor Cross has shown,²⁰ which appeared in March, 1742 (*Joseph Andrews* was published in February), contained a high compliment for Fielding's dramatic satires. And though Pope may have been at first deceived by two scurrilous pamphlets directed at him which purported to have been written by "Hercules Vinegar,"²⁰ he spoke pleasantly enough, after the *Miscellanies* appeared (in 1743), of Fielding's reference in *A Journey from this World to the Next* to Ralph Allen's "handsome building . . . by the Bath." "Fielding," he says in a letter to Allen, "has paid you a pretty Complement upon your House."²¹ As Pope turned the leaves of the three volumes of *Miscellanies* he must have discovered also more than one "pretty Complement" to himself. Yet despite the amicable relations which presum-

¹⁸ Chesterfield's letter to David Mallet, November 5, 1753.

¹⁹ Dobson's *Samuel Richardson*, p. 58.

²⁰ Cross's *Fielding*, I, 366-368.

²¹ *Letters from Pope to Ralph Allen*, British Museum, Egerton MSS., 1947. According to "George Paston" this is an allusion to the story of Wilson, Book III of *Joseph Andrews* (*Mr. Pope his Life and Times*, New York, 1909, II, 675, 675 note); but, as Mr. Dobson has shown (*At Prior Park*, New York, *n.d.*, p. 21), it should be referred to Fielding's *Journey from this World to the Next*.

ably existed at this time between poet and novelist, no reference by Pope to Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* has come down to us in the published correspondence.

Swift, according to Mrs. Pilkington, had a high opinion of Fielding's "wit," notwithstanding his previous jibe at him as a writer of verse; but we are not surprised at finding no reference in his works to *Joseph Andrews*, since by November, 1742, he had become hopelessly insane. It is strange, however, that there is, apparently, no mention of the novel in the correspondence of Aaron Hill. Praise—fulsome praise—of *Pamela* abounds, of course; and in one of his letters to Richardson, Hill expresses his indignation on the appearance of *Shamela*; but *Joseph Andrews* seems to have been entirely ignored. Stranger still, no letter by Richardson himself on the subject of Fielding's first novel *written before the success of Tom Jones*, has yet been discovered. *After* that success, we shall see, Richardson was loud in his dispraise. But if there be any reference to *Joseph Andrews* in the unpublished letters at South Kensington, the industry of Dr. Poetzsche,²² who assembled the Fielding passages in his Richardson's *Belesenheit*, has failed to unearth it. The malevolence which everyone knows about belongs to the period *after* the triumph of *Tom Jones*—a volume of abuse which further unearthing could hardly equal. While Fielding was winning (in 1749) popular applause by *Tom Jones*, Richardson, looking back over his rival's career, assured Lady Bradshaigh that "Before his Joseph Andrews . . . the poor man wrote without being read, except when his Pasquins,—&c. roused party attention and the legislature at the same time;"²³ and in another equally spiteful letter to her ladyship (January 9, 1749-1750) he remarked: "As to the list of Fielding's performances, I have seen at least twenty of them; for none of which, before Joseph Andrews (except for such as were of a party turn), he gained either credit or read-

²² Erich Poetzsche, *Samuel Richardsons Belesenheit*, Kiel, 1907.

²³ *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, London, 1804, IV, 286.

ers."²⁴ These references on the part of a jealous rival imply that *Joseph Andrews* did enjoy a certain measure of success; in 1742, however, and, indeed, up to the time of the appearance of *Tom Jones*, Fielding's popularity as a novelist was obviously not formidable enough to call forth the exceptional malignancy which we are soon to consider.

A careful examination of the periodicals of the day reveals no evidence of an overwhelming immediate triumph on the part of *Joseph Andrews*. Take, for example, the two main reviews of the period, *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The London Magazine*. The *Gentleman's*, which two years before allowed an excellent puff to *Pamela*,²⁵ contains no reference to Fielding's novel in 1742 except the bare mention of the title in the Register of Books. And though it may be objected that Johnson (the implacable detractor of Fielding during nearly a lifetime) was then employed by the editor Cave, it may be answered that as the anonymous writer of the "Parliamentary Debates" he had not as yet attained to any great degree of eminence. Furthermore, Johnson declared thirty years later that he had never read *Joseph Andrews*.²⁶ It is unlikely that the thrifty Cave would crush out even an allusion in the Poet's Corner to a book that was really the darling of the town; to *Tom Jones*, when Johnson's influence was unquestionably very great, occasional references crept in, despite the fact that it was not reviewed. Even if the omission of an account of *Joseph Andrews* in the *Gentleman's* can be laid to Johnson's opposition, how shall we explain a similar neglect on the part of both *The London Magazine* and *The Works of the Learned*? Mention of the first and second editions was duly made in the *London*, but no review ever appeared in that periodical; while *The Works of the Learned*, which devoted (in December, 1740) six pages to *Pamela*, utterly disdained an account of *Joseph Andrews*.

²⁴ *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, IV, 312.

²⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XI, 56 (January, 1741).

²⁶ *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, edited by G. B. Hill, Oxford, 1887, II, 174 (April 6, 1772).

Still, though the success of *Joseph Andrews* fell far short of the triumph of *Pamela*, Fielding's novel was, during the interval between its appearance (1742) and the publication of *Tom Jones* (1749) unquestionably a well-known book. This is shown, if by nothing else, by the testimony of the editions; recent investigations by Mr. J. Paul de Castro have completed our information regarding the actual number of copies printed.²⁷ A summary of this matter has been given by Professor Cross: "Three London editions of 'Joseph Andrews,' six thousand and five hundred copies altogether, in the course of thirteen months, with a French translation, twice printed, soon following, would indicate a body of readers numbering about half that enjoyed by 'Pamela,' of which there were six English editions the first year. Two more authorized editions of 'Joseph Andrews' were yet to appear in English during Fielding's lifetime—one in November, 1748, though dated 1749, and the other in 1751. There were also two Dublin editions, the first of which came out in 1742, the second in 1747."²⁸

Besides the evidence of the editions there are scattered allusions, though not so many as one would expect. We may note, for example, the personal interest with which Sir Dudley Ryder (who afterwards became Chief-Justice Ryder) attempted, as he wrote his lady, "to rescue Jos. Andrews and Parson Adams out of the hands of pirates." He has been unsuccessful so far, he says (October 23, 1742), but believes that "another broadside next week will do the business."²⁹

Hogarth's reference, also, should be remembered. In 1743, perhaps as a return compliment for being mentioned in his friend's first novel, the celebrated painter recommends (in his *Characters and Caricaturas*, Plate I) to all those persons who

²⁷ Mr. de Castro gives excerpts from Strahan's ledger in *Notes and Queries*, November, 1917, Twelfth Series, III, 465; see also his article in *Bibliographical Society Transactions*, Second Series, I, 258 (*The Library*, Fourth Series, I), March, 1921.

²⁸ Cross's *Fielding*, I, 357.

²⁹ John Lord Campbell's *Lives of the Chief Justices*, London, 1849, II, 260.

desire "a farther explanation of the Difference betwixt Character and Caricatura" a perusal of "ye Preface to *Joh Andrews*."³⁰

Then there is the evidence furnished by the prologue to Fielding's drama *The Wedding Day* (1743), for the success of which Arthur Murphy declared, long afterwards, that "the author of *Joseph Andrews*" had "raised the highest expectation."³¹ In this prologue, "Writ and Spoken by Mr. Macklin," Fielding is humorously told that he had better have stuck to "honest *Abram Adams*," who, "in spite of Critics, can make" his "Readers laugh," than to have gone on with play-writing. As he penned this badinage, Macklin, it would seem, was counting on an audience to whom Parson Adams was a familiar figure.

Fielding himself evidently felt that *Joseph Andrews* had not been unsuccessful, for in the *Miscellanies* (1743), which followed in the wake of his novel, he professes to have "communicated" the "Manuscript" of the *Journey from this World to the Next* to "my Friend Parson *Abraham Adams*, who after a long and careful Perusal, returned it me with his Opinion, that there was more in it than at first appeared."³² Still other "communications" from the author's old friend are to be found in *The True Patriot*; for example, in the issues of December 17, 1745, and January 28, 1746. According to the testimony of Warton, Fielding in 1746 set a higher value upon *Joseph Andrews* than upon any of his previous works. "Russell and I," writes young Joseph Warton (who had just "spent two evenings with Fielding") October 29, 1746, "sat up with the Poet [Fielding] till one or two in the morning, and were inexpressibly diverted. I find he values, as he justly may, his *Joseph Andrews* above all his writings."³³

³⁰ Ireland, J., *A Supplement to Hogarth Illustrated*, London, 1798, p. 342; for a reproduction of the plate, see George Paston, *Social Caricature in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1906, p. 2.

³¹ Arthur Murphy's *Life of David Garrick*, London, 1801, I, 49.

³² Introduction to the *Journey from this World to the Next*.

³³ Wooll, J., *Biographical Memoirs of the late . . . Joseph Warton*, London, 1806, p. 215 (letter VI).

During the same year, young William Mason had Fielding in mind in his poem entitled *The Birth of Fashion*. Half a century later, looking back on his youthful production, the aged poet writes, "I suspect that the young Author [*i.e.*, Mason himself] now, and before in this epistle, took his idea of female shape and beauty from Fielding's Description of Fanny in his Adventures of Joseph Andrews; an idea, which, compared with what it is now, was in that author as absurd, as in himself."⁸⁴ The line in Mason's poem, however, refers specifically not to *Joseph Andrews* but to the "round-ear'd cap and boddice" fashionable in the 'Forties. Allusions in prose to Fielding's first novel are extremely difficult to find; but allusions in verse by the well-known poets of the day are almost nonexistent. The poems and collected works of Gray and of Edward Young yield us nothing; nor do we find any references in the works of Thomson. It should be remembered, perhaps, that the very successful *Tom Thumb*, in which, a dozen years before, Fielding had scored the dramatic absurdities of both Young and Thomson, was still a favorite. The lash of so powerful a satirist could not soon be forgotten.

Between *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) very few references to Fielding's first novel made their appearance in the two chief magazines—the *Gentleman's* and the *London*—though some of these were commendatory. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, for instance, permitted in its columns several allusions to the book: January, 1743; October, 1745; and May, 1746. The first is an excerpt from *The Craftsman*, January 1, 1743, in which "The Author of The History of Joseph Andrews" is quoted regarding an "Explanation of the Ridiculous."⁸⁵ The original passage in *The Craftsman* reads as follows: "I honour the Author of that facetious Work the History of Joseph Andrews, for what he saith in his Preface by way of explanation of the Ridiculous. . . . Nor do I know any one piece of Criticism better worth the study (if they

⁸⁴ *The Works of William Mason*, London, 1911, I, 153 note. Mason says the poem was "written in 1746."

⁸⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIII, 25 (January, 1743).

study at all) of those Critics and Orators who endeavour to divert their Audience and Readers with pleasant Images of the Public Calamities and arch Caracatures of those Persons to whom they are thought to be owing."³⁶ The second reference in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (October, 1745) is in the form of a note to one of the poems of the month. "*The author of the History of Joseph Andrews,*" runs this humorous comment, "*had certainly seen this performance, when he wrote that celebrated poem in praise of the Rev. Mr Abraham Adams.*"³⁷ The third reference, May, 1746, purports to be a letter from Parson Adams himself: "*If you ever read the entertaining history of Joseph Andrews, You cannot but have some notion of the Rev. Mr Abraham Adams, and his little son Dick.*" Then follows little Dick's Latin translation "*of a favourite song of . . . Mr Andrews*"; that is, "The Song" of Chloe and Strephon,³⁸ which occurs in the Twelfth Chapter of Book Two of *Joseph Andrews*.

Of interest in passing is a peculiar statement which is to be found in *Scanderbeg* (1747). While listing English dramatic authors (with "some Account of their Lives") up to "the Year 1747," the compiler says that Fielding "is supposed to be the Author of *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, etc. a diverting Romance, wrote in Imitation of Cervantes."³⁹ The doubt here expressed may be in part accounted for by the fact that *Joseph Andrews* made its original appearance anonymously; even on the title-page of the second edition (August, 1742) the author's name was not in evidence. But in 1743, probably because of the piratical attempt on this novel, Fielding had his publisher, Andrew Millar, advertise the third edition as "By Henry Fielding,"⁴⁰ and, for the first time, insert the name of the author in the title-page. In 1743, moreover, Macklin's ref-

³⁶ *The Craftsman*, No. 862, January 1, 1743.

³⁷ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XV, 550 (October, 1745).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 268 (May, 1746).

³⁹ *Scanderbeg*, London, 1747, p. 234.

⁴⁰ *The St. James's Evening Post*, March 10-15, 1743 (No. 5175).

See also Nos. 5176-5181, etc.

erence to Parson Adams in the prologue to *The Wedding Day* must have been well known. And in 1744 Fielding again informed the public in the title-page of the third edition of *The Historical Register*, that he was the "AUTHOR of the History of *Joseph Andrews*."⁴¹ There should have been no question, therefore, as to who wrote *Joseph Andrews*; and that there could be in 1747 any doubt, real or assumed, concerning the authorship of the book may be regarded as evidence that Fielding had achieved no such splendid triumph as had come to Richardson through *Pamela*. On the other hand, the allusions in *The Gentleman's Magazine* which have been noted above are sufficient testimony to the fact that in the years 1743, 1745, and 1746 *Joseph Andrews* was still in the public eye. In 1748, moreover, before the advent of *Tom Jones*, a fourth edition of the novel made its appearance.

Undoubtedly the very encouraging sale of *Joseph Andrews* materially aided Fielding in disposing of his three volumes of *Miscellanies* (published by subscription) in 1743; the list of subscribers to the latter work is indicative of a rather widespread interest in the author. Headed by the Prince of Wales, who took fifteen sets, the *haut monde* came forward handsomely. Among others, the noble families of Argyle, Bedford, Chesterfield, Devonshire, Denbigh, Marlborough, Newcastle, Pembroke, Richmond, Strafford, Shaftesbury, and Westmoreland were represented—even Sir Robert Walpole, we are surprised to find, putting his name down for ten sets. Then there were the political leaders—Pitt, Lyttelton, Dodington, and Hanbury Williams; clergymen, including Bishop Hoadly of Winchester; a number of physicians, among whom was Dr. Edward Wilmot, who waited upon his Majesty himself; the famous Admiral Vernon; theatrical people, among whom were Charles Fleetwood, manager of Drury Lane Theatre, Kitty Clive, and Garrick; finally a host of lawyers, not only of Fielding's own Middle Temple, but of Gray's

⁴¹ *The Historical Register* . . . To which is added . . . *Eurydice Hiss'd*, third ed., London, 1744.

Inn, Lincoln's Inn, and the Inner Temple—all in all an imposing array of names! Presumably *Joseph Andrews*, the success of which had increased their interest in the book for which they listed themselves as subscribers, must have been well known to them, either from hearsay or from actual perusal. But however that may be, nothing notable has come down to us regarding Fielding's first novel from the persons here listed. Dodington is said by Cumberland⁴² to have enjoyed reading *Jonathan Wild* to some noble ladies who "made part" of the "domestic society" at Eastbury, but no mention of *Joseph Andrews* appears in his famous diary. Lyttelton, of whom more will be said in the next chapter, seems to have left us nothing;⁴³ neither has Pitt nor Hanbury Williams. Nor do we find anything in the voluminous correspondence of Garrick.⁴⁴

In view of the fact that so many persons of note subscribed for Fielding's *Miscellanies* it is remarkable that no celebrated *dictum* from any of them concerning *Joseph Andrews* has been recorded in literary history. We may infer that to the majority in its own day, at least before the publication of *Tom Jones*, Fielding's first novel seemed at best little more than an extremely clever parody and burlesque which contained the diverting character of Parson Adams. But a very clear-sighted woman who was already gaining public notice for her literary attainments saw more deeply; this was the "learned" Miss Elizabeth Carter. Oddly enough the correspondent who advised her to read the book was that future Richardsonian who became the "celebrated" Miss Talbot. "I want very much to know," writes Miss Talbot (June 1, 1742), "whether you have yet condescended to read 'Joseph Andrews,' as I am well

⁴² Cumberland, R., *Memoirs*, London, 1807, I, 192.

⁴³ Though Fielding himself tells us in the preface to *Tom Jones* that his patron expressly desired him to go on with a greater work than he had hitherto been engaged upon; that is, greater than *Joseph Andrews* or *Jonathan Wild*.

⁴⁴ There is, of course, the prologue to *The Fathers*, written by Garrick a generation later.

assured the character of Mr. Adams is drawn from one in real life: if the book strikes you as it did me, you will certainly come up to town next winter, that you and I may join in contriving some means of getting acquainted with him."⁴⁵ Obviously the character of Parson Adams was impressing itself even upon those whose attitude toward Fielding was one of condescension.

Miss Carter, it seems, had heard so ill an account of *Joseph Andrews* that she had not thought of procuring the book. "It was your recommendation," she tells Miss Talbot, "which first tempted me to enquire after it."⁴⁶ When at length the novel was in her hands she read it with the keenest enjoyment. In her reply, January 1, 1743, she thanked her friend for the "perfectly agreeable entertainment" the book had given her, and proceeded to write the most cordial appreciation of its merits which contemporary letters and memoirs afford. "*Joseph Andrews*," declares Miss Carter, "contains such a surprising variety of nature, wit, morality, and good sense, as is scarcely to be met with in any one composition, and there is such a spirit of benevolence runs through the whole, as I think renders it peculiarly charming. The author has touched some particular instances of inhumanity which can only be hit in this kind of writing, and I do not remember to have seen observed any where else; these certainly cannot be represented in too detestable a light, as they are so severely felt by persons they affect, and looked upon in too careless a manner by the rest of the world."⁴⁷

To her credit be it spoken, Miss Carter was, from the first, in her correspondence, an unwearied defender of Fielding. The vivid scenes of *Joseph Andrews* etched themselves indelibly upon her mind; while reading of Eumæus, for instance, in the *Memoirs of Ulysses* she thought of that modern Eumæus, Parson Trulliber, and called attention to the parallel

⁴⁵ *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, London, 1809, I, 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 19, 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 23.

in her letter to Miss Talbot (September 5, 1746). When *Tom Jones* appeared (1749), and Miss Talbot herself, then a full-fledged Richardsonian, fell foul of that young gentleman, Miss Carter was sorry to find her friend so "outrageous" in her denunciation. And when, in 1752, the "fine folks" were unanimous in calling *Amelia* "sad stuff," she longed to "engage" her friends in behalf of that maltreated book. Any lover of Fielding who reads Miss Carter's excellent defense of his novels in her private correspondence must regret that when she was inclined to panegyric she preferred to eulogize Richardson rather than his rival. But of this more will be said later.

For our present purposes the most interesting fact about Miss Carter's letter to Miss Talbot is not that she appreciated and praised *Joseph Andrews*, but that current misinterpretation and abuse of the book were so general and so violent that she delayed a perusal of it, and that when she finally did read it she was moved to a defense. "It must surely be a marvellous wrongheadedness and perplexity of understanding," she exclaims, "that can make any one consider this complete satire as a very immoral thing, and of the most dangerous tendency, and yet I have met with some people who treat it in the most outrageous manner."⁴⁸

This passage was written in January, 1743. Who were the "people" that treated *Joseph Andrews* so outrageously? Were they the Richardsonians, to whom any reflection upon *Pamela* appeared in the light of sacrilege? Or were they political opponents of Fielding and therefore outrageous about anything he chanced to write? One cannot tell. But it is clear enough that Fielding's path as a novelist was from the first a thorny one. Richardson's journey up the hill of fame was comparatively untroubled: a jibing pamphlet, now and then, was directed at his books; but the man himself escaped, for he never engaged in any dramatic, journalistic, or political controversies; and in his rôle as moralist he never disturbed the conventional ideas of his formal and self-complacent age. How

⁴⁸ *A Series of Letters*, I, 23-24.

different from the very beginning was the life of Fielding—Fielding the Dramatic Censor of the Social and Political Evils of his time, the Destroyer of Rant and Bombast and Sickly Sentimentality in play and novel, the Hercules Vinegar who did battle with the legions of Grub Street! A good share of contemporary misinterpretation and abuse of *Joseph Andrews* can be attributed to the efforts of Fielding's personal, dramatic, journalistic, and political enemies, who used every conceivable means to diminish not merely his fame as an author but his reputation as a man as well.

The injurious treatment which had been accorded Fielding by his libelous antagonists provoked him in the preface to the *Miscellanies* (1743) to cry out against the scandalous pamphlets and other productions which had been fathered upon him. "I look on the practice of stabbing a Man's Character in the Dark," he writes, "to be as base and as barbarous as that of stabbing him with a Poignard in the same manner." This protest was, however, of no avail. And as the attacks upon him continued he took occasion in the preface which he furnished to the second edition of his sister's *David Simple* (1744) to denounce his "good Friends the Critics" who had endeavored to fasten upon him "half the Scurrility, Bawdy, Treason and Blasphemy, which these few last Years have produced." Three years later, in her *Familiar Letters*, Fielding's sister Sarah herself exclaimed against the indignities which were continually being heaped upon her brother. Apropos of several letters of his contributed to her volume she writes: "*The following five letters were given me by the Author of the Preface. I should have thought this Hint unnecessary, had not much Nonsense and Scurrility been unjustly imputed to him by the Good-Judgment or Good-nature of the Age. They can know but little of his Writings, who want to have them pointed out; but they know much less of him, who impute any such base and scandalous Productions to his Pen.*"⁴⁹ By the following year, things had come to such a pass that in one of the numbers

⁴⁹ *Familiar Letters*, London, 1747, II, 294.

of the *Jacobite's Journal* Fielding caricatured even more vigorously. He certainly, he seems, have "attempted to make" his character "with every kind of Reproach," portraying "an unprincipled Self, even to my boyish Years, when they have given me almost every Vice in Human Nature. Again they have followed me with unrelenting Insults, and a Profane and unmanly attack they have very recently made, that I have neither Honour nor Knowledge. And lastly, as an Author they have affected to treat me with more Contempt than Mr. Pope, who hath given Meads and no less Pains in the Character of a Writer than myself proper to bestow on the lowest Scribe of his Time." In short, "before my paper [i.e., *The Jacobite's Journal*] had reached the 20th number a heavier load of Scandal hath been cast upon me than I believe ever fell to the Share of a Single Man."⁶⁰

The story of these attacks upon Fielding, which were mainly instigated by political opposition, has been told more than once, it is unnecessary to recapitulate the same here. As Lawrence declared, long ago (1855), "Perry being at the time ten high, and private character was savagely calumniated by some of the creatures who contributed to the newspapers. Fielding appears to have been attacked with a particular malignity. His assailants exhausted the vocabulary of scurrility, and indulged in the most wanton personalities." "The faults and irregularities of his life were absurdly magnified. He was treated with his poverty; accused of corrupt motives; and assailed with personal insults of the grossest character. . . . his enemies, instead of engaging in a fair controversy with him, collected together all the scandalous tales that had ever been circulated about him, and lampooned him without mercy."⁶¹

Inasmuch as nothing that Fielding had ever written was free from the stain of his deepest antagonism, Joseph Andrews came in for its share of abuse at the hands of the par-

⁶⁰ Gordon, *Man G. M., Henry Fielding*, London, 1910, pp. 166-169.

⁶¹ Lawrence, *F., The Life of Henry Fielding*, London, 1855, pp. 225-226.

nalists and pamphleteers. Sometimes, as in the case of a pamphlet called *The Patriot Analyzed* (1748), the attack took the form of an ironical compliment. "Don't you think," asks the writer, that "the Pen that writ *Pasquin*, *Joseph Andrews*, and the *Champion*, could have answered the *Apology* [*i.e.*, the spurious pamphlet entitled Winnington's *Apology*], if he had had the Will?" More commonly, however, Fielding's assailants preferred the bludgeon to the rapier. Here is a sample from the periodical press. In *Old England*, March 5, 1748, "Porcupine Pelagius" makes Fielding give the following account of his career:

"Hunted after Fortune, and lived on Kept-Mistresses for a while; scored deep at the Taverns, borrow'd Money of my Landlords and their Drawers; . . . abused my Benefactors in the Administration of public Affairs, of religious Dispensations, of Justice, and of the Stage; hackney'd for Booksellers and News-Papers; lampoon'd the Virtuous, wrote the Adventures of *Footmen*, and the Lives of *Thief-Catchers*; cramp't the Stage, debased the Press, and brought it into Jeopardy; bilk'd every Lodging for Ten Years together, and every Ale-house and Chandler's Shop in every Neighbourhood; Defrauded and revil'd all my Acquaintance, and being quite out of Cash, Credit and Character, as well as out of Charity with all Mankind, haunted by Duns . . . [and] Bumbailiffs, hollow'd, hooted at and chased from every Side and by every Voice."⁵² This tirade, too good to pass by, was reported at some length in *The Gentleman's Magazine*.⁵³ By the "Adventures of *Footmen*" and the "Lives of *Thief-Catchers*," Porcupine Pelagius meant, of course, *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild*. Even Parson Adams did not escape; by means of this "dry unnatural character" Fielding "ridicul'd," it was said, "all the inferior clergy."

More vituperation of this sort may be gathered not only

⁵² *Old England*, March 5, 1748, pp. 1-2.

⁵³ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XVIII, 129 (March, 1748).

from *Old England* but from *The London Evening Post*, both periodicals harping upon the "lowness" of *Joseph Andrews*, the

Low Humour, like *his own*, he [Fielding] once exprest,
In *Footman*, *Country Wench*, and *Country Priest*.⁵⁴

But enough has been given for the present purpose. The constant representation of Fielding as a foe to virtue, a scoffer at the clergy, and a dissolute painter of low life undoubtedly served to debase him in the estimation not merely of his enemies but of many persons not otherwise ill-disposed. At a time when realism in fiction was apt to be regarded as "low," the continued abuse of the novelist in the newspapers, reverberated in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The London Magazine*, was unquestionably influential in obscuring to Fielding's contemporaries the great achievement and promise that we now recognize in *Joseph Andrews* and in *Jonathan Wild*. "There is no evidence," writes Miss Godden, that Fielding's "audacious innovation, his splendid adventure in literature, *Joseph Andrews*, really revealed the existence of a new genius in their midst to the Whigs and Tories of those factious days, to the gay frequenters of the play-house, to the barristers at Westminster Hall and on the Western Circuit. In 1748 Fielding must have been, to his many audiences, a witty and well-born man of letters who, at forty-one, had as yet achieved no towering success; a facile dramatist; and a master of slashing political invective, growing perplexingly impartial, alike in his praise and his condemnation. While, as regards outward circumstances, the struggling barrister, baffled in his professional hopes by persistent attacks of gout, was now so far enlisted, to use his own fine image, under the black banner of poverty, that even the small post and hard duties of a Bow Street magistrate were worth his acceptance."⁵⁵

To conclude this chapter, it may be said in general that *Joseph Andrews* had considerably enhanced Fielding's reputation as a writer; and, in particular, that the character of Par-

⁵⁴ *The London Evening-Post*, No. 3236 (July 28-July 30, 1748).

⁵⁵ Miss Godden's *Fielding*, pp. 174-175.

son Adams had securely niched itself in the popular mind. As has been seen, Fielding's first novel must have enjoyed from the beginning a good measure of popularity. The number and size of the editions, the almost immediate translation into French, the piratical attempt upon it and the solicitude for the rescue of Parson Adams expressed by such a man as Sir Dudley Ryder—these facts are indisputable evidence of public favor. On the other hand, biographers have always found it difficult to produce very many eulogistic references to the novel by those who were admittedly competent in literature. It need not be repeated that a critic like Gray, who hurried away from the perusal of *Joseph Andrews* to enjoy the paradise of Mari-vaux and Crébillon, can hardly be claimed (despite the efforts of several writers to do so) as a notable admirer of Fielding's. Furthermore, though Shenstone specifically tells us that some "few" people like the book, none of these were such as he ever esteemed "tasters." It is true that neither Shenstone nor Gray was really fitted by nature to enjoy *Joseph Andrews*; but, if we may believe Miss Carter, misinterpretation of the novel passed beyond the mere apathy of a pair of somewhat fastidious poets to such downright and perverse abuse that she felt called upon to exclaim against it. Significantly enough, the form in which Miss Carter's own tribute appears is that of a defense against current misunderstanding and vituperation. In the seven years between *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the bitter attacks of many enemies—political, journalistic, and personal—were, no doubt, injurious to Fielding's fame. On this account his outspoken castigation of the evils of his time was, apparently, either little noted or, indeed, strangely perverted. Again, the luster of his innovation in the way of realism was perceptibly obscured by the new vogue of sentimental fiction and by the fact that *Joseph Andrews* was a confessed parody upon a book which, purporting to exhibit "Virtue Rewarded," had received the plaudits of the clergy themselves. Truth to say, *Joseph Andrews* was something of a hybrid, and the parody part undoubtedly caused many a reader to over-

look the serious purpose of the whole and to pronounce the novel merely "diverting."

Here is the opinion of the Chevalier Ramsay, in a letter dated September 1, 1742: "I have read the first book of 'The History of Joseph Andrews,' but don't believe I shall be able to finish the first volume. Dull burlesque is still more insupportable than dull morality. Perhaps my not understanding the language of low life in an English style is the reason of my disgust; but I am afraid your Britannic wit is at as low an ebb as the French."⁵⁶ This letter is significant of the taste of the time on both sides of the water. To many others beside the author of the *Travels of Cyrus*, Fielding's underlying ironic purpose was either unperceived or ignored by those whose chief delight was in the elegant.

The silence of literary persons of the age can hardly be misinterpreted. Pope, Walpole, Young, Chesterfield, Aaron Hill, Warburton—all of whom testify to the triumph of *Pamela*—yield us little or nothing regarding *Joseph Andrews*. As will be noted in succeeding chapters, there came a time when the book was frequently regarded as the equal or the superior of *Tom Jones*. But in the period before the appearance of Fielding's great Epic of Human Nature historians of Fielding's life and fame have always found it difficult in the case of *Joseph Andrews* to discover (notwithstanding the large number of copies sold) anything like the chorus of praise by eminent literary persons that was bestowed upon the novel which it deservedly parodied.

⁵⁶ *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, by John Hill Burton, Edinburgh, 1846, I, 12 note.

CHAPTER II

Tom Jones: The Riddle of Its Vogue

1749-1751

I

IT has occasioned some surprise that *Tom Jones*, Fielding's second and supreme achievement in the way of pure fiction, did not, in spite of the flattering sale of *Joseph Andrews*, appear in its completed state until February, 1749, seven years after the advent of Parson Adams. But during the early part of this period, while Fielding was addressing himself manfully to the practice of law, the reputation of being a writer of fiction seemed to him for the time being a dangerous one. Testimony to this effect we have from his own pen: in the preface which he contributed to the second edition of his sister's *David Simple* (1744) he felt it necessary to state that he was not the author of that novel (which had appeared anonymously) not only on his sister's account but on his own. He was afraid, he said, that to continue to be known as a fiction-writer would "injure" him in his "Profession" as a lawyer. Nor was his fear unwarranted when we consider the added scurrility and abuse that *Joseph Andrews*—in which his enemies pretended to find an attack upon the legal profession—had drawn down upon him. When, therefore, in 1744, Fielding declared that he had neither the "Leisure" nor the "Inclination" to write such a work of fiction, we have no reason to question his sincerity. Not more than two years later, however, according to his most recent biographer, Fielding was working at his *magnum opus*, *Tom Jones*, upon the composition of which, as he afterwards asserted, he had spent some "thousands of hours."¹ Just why² Fielding turned again to

¹ "The novel, I take it, was begun as early as the summer of 1746," during the interval of leisure "between the discontinuance of 'The True Patriot' in June, 1746, and the establishment of 'The Jacobite's Journal' in December, 1747." Cross's *Fielding*, II, 100.

² As M. Digeon suggests, Fielding may have been spurred on by the

fiction-writing we do not know; but in the "Dedication" of his novel to Lyttelton he states that, several years before, his patron had urged him to attempt an extended work of that comic-epic variety the rules for which he had laid down in the initial chapters of *Joseph Andrews*. "To you, Sir," he writes, "it is owing that this history was ever begun. It was by your desire that I first thought of such a composition. So many years have since past, that you may have, perhaps, forgotten this circumstance: but your desires are to me in the nature of commands; and the impression of them is never to be erased from my memory." And then Fielding goes on to say that without Lyttelton's "assistance," and, he implies, that of Ralph Allen also, this "history," wherein he had "endeavoured to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices," would never have been "completed."

Joseph Andrews, as has been said, appeared anonymously, without, so far as we know, the patronage of any of Fielding's influential friends. Very different was the début of *Tom Jones*. Not only was it furnished with a splendid dedication to Lyttelton, which, as the author confesses, had "run into a preface," but it was approved and heralded by his patron long before its actual appearance. Fielding himself is witness to this fact: "You have commended the book so warmly," he declares, that you should not "be ashamed of reading your name before the dedication." Apropos of Lyttelton's commendations a story has long been current to the effect that before *Tom Jones* was published the manuscript was read aloud to a number of distinguished persons who were being entertained at Radway Grange in Warwickshire. "'Lord Chatham and Lord Lyttelton,'" wrote (in 1907) the Rev. George Miller (great-grandson of Sanderson Miller, the architect), "'came to Radway to visit my ancestor, when Lord Chatham planted three trees to commemorate the visit, and a stone urn was placed between them. Fielding was also of the party and read "Tom

knowledge that Richardson was at work on *Clarissa*.—*Les Romans de Fielding*, Paris, 1923, p. 164. But we cannot—with M. Digeon—regard *Tom Jones* as an answer to *Clarissa*.

Jones" in manuscript after dinner for the opinion of his hearers before publishing it.'"³

Thus runs this charming story. It is somewhat surprising that in the published work of neither Lyttelton nor of the elder Pitt do we find apparently any reference to Fielding's great novel. But it is clear that Lyttelton and Pitt as well were so enthusiastic about *Tom Jones* that they used their best endeavors among their acquaintances to arouse an interest in it and thereby insure its success. So strenuous were their efforts in Fielding's behalf that several months after the appearance of the book both Lyttelton and Pitt on account of their zeal came in for a terrible tongue-lashing in the scurrilous columns of *Old England*, the principal organ of their political opponents. Professor Cross⁴ has called attention to the following paragraphs addressed to Lyttelton in the issue of May 27, 1749:

"Not only the Dedication [of *Tom Jones*], but common Fame is full of the warm Commendations you have given of the afore-mentioned *Romance*. You have run up and down the Town, and made Visits, and wrote Letters merely for that Purpose. You puffed it up so successfully about Court, and among Placemen and Pensioners, that, having caught it from you, they thought it incumbent upon them to echo it about the Coffee houses; insomuch, that all the Women laboured under the Burthen of Expectation, 'till it was midwived into the World by your all-auspicious Hand, and proclaimed by them to be the gooddest Book that was ever read.

"While it was yet in Embrio, or rather, after it was licked up into *Wit* and *Humour*, and dished finely up in Lavender, your Zanies puffed and blew it up so into Fame, among his old Masters the Booksellers, that they begun to lament their Want of Discernment touching the Value of the *precious Jewel*, which, like the Cock in the Fable, they had despised and cast away on the very Dunghill they found it in. But, by the Care

³ Godden, Miss G. M., *Henry Fielding*, p. 179; and George Harris's *Life of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke*, London, 1847, II, 456-457.

⁴ Cross's *Fielding*, II, 114-115.

of yourself and Brother Deserter, *Two of the best and worthiest who are strongly and zealously his Friends*, (yclept the Poet and the Orator!) he has been so improved and polished, as to exhibit finer Lustres than ever blazed from the great Diamond, which founded the Family of one of his said *Two best and worthiest Friends*. Lo! the Effects of the Public Treasury and Pay-Office!" By "the Orator" was meant, of course, William Pitt, Paymaster-General of the Forces, whose grandfather sold the famous "great Diamond" to Louis XV.

After this fashion were the efforts of Lyttelton and his "Brother Deserter," William Pitt, held up to ridicule by their political enemies. What principally concerns us is the assiduity in Fielding's behalf which *Old England* charges against Lyttelton. It has always been known from Fielding's own statement in the "Dedication" that his patron recommended *Tom Jones* to friends before the novel actually appeared; but none of Fielding's biographers has, I think, made use of the following interesting letters which are found in *The Orrery Papers*. From them we learn on the excellent authority of the Rev. Thomas Birch, the eminent historian and biographer, that Lyttelton was commending *Tom Jones* to his acquaintances as early as January, 1748, five months before the assignment of the novel to Millar (June 11, 1748) and over a year before it was placed on sale. We also learn on the best authority—for Birch, though dull, was a trustworthy reporter—something that has before been merely conjecture—namely, what features of the novel Lyttelton regarded as most admirable.

In the first of these letters, dated "January 19, 1747-1748," Birch, who was supplying the Earl of Orrery with literary news, informs his noble correspondent that "Mr. Fielding is printing three volumes of Adventures under the title of *The Foundling*. Mr. Littleton, who has read the manuscript, commends the performance to me as an excellent one, and abounding with strong and lively painting of characters, and a very copious and happy invention in the conduct of

the story.”⁵ Here we have that specific commendation of the plot and characterization of *Tom Jones* which one looks for in vain in the published works of Fielding’s patron. The second letter from Birch to the Earl of Orrery is dated September 30, 1748. “Mr. Richardson’s Sequel to *Clarissa* is in the press,” he writes, “and will be compleated about the middle of November; and Mr. Fielding’s novel called the *Foundling* will be published about the same time. His Bookseller had so great expectations from it that he gave him £600 for the Copy; and Mr Littleton, who has read part of it in manuscript, speaks of it in terms of high approbation.”⁶ Presumably Birch had again been talking with Lyttelton, who was more enthusiastic about *Tom Jones* than ever. The third letter, dated December 20, 1748, runs as follows: “Mr. Fielding’s novel, called the *Foundling*, in 6 Volumes, was expected before this time, but will not be published before the middle, or perhaps end, of next month. Humour is the chief characteristic of it, though I am told by my friends, who have seen it, that it is not destitute of the instructive and pathetic.”⁷ From this letter we have additional confirmation of the fact already known, that, in one form or another, some of the volumes of *Tom Jones* were privately circulated before the actual appearance of the entire work. By the middle of December, Birch, who kept in touch with many of the notable persons of his day, was already hearing about the merits of the novel from others beside Lyttelton.

One of those who were privileged to read Fielding’s book in part before all six volumes were published was Lady Hertford, afterwards Duchess of Somerset. “I have been very well entertained lately,” she wrote Lord Bolingbroke’s sister, Lady Luxborough, November 20, 1748, “with the two first Volumes of the *Foundling*, written by Mr. FIELDING, but not to be published till the 22^d of *January*; if the same Spirit runs through the whole Work, I think it will be much preferable

⁵ *The Orrery Papers*, London, 1903, II, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 49.

to JOSEPH ANDREWS."⁸ Professor Cross has surmised that the volumes which Lady Hertford read were advance copies; and Birch's statement about the opinions of his "friends," who "have seen" the novel, supports the conjecture.

Thanks to the influence of Lyttelton and his acquaintances, therefore, excellent preparations were thus made for the successful appearance of *Tom Jones*. "I remember I heard so much in *Tom Jones's* praise," declared Lady Luxborough afterwards, "that when I read him, I hated him."⁹ Moreover, interest in the forthcoming novel was the keener because of the circumstance that in the summer of 1748¹⁰ Fielding had been awarded the important office of Justice of the Peace for Westminster. This appointment, of course, served to increase the virulence of Fielding's enemies, whose abuse now grew more violent than ever before. *Old England*, which had kept up a flow of Billingsgate during 1748¹¹—attacking the novelist as a Turncoat, an Obscene Writer, a Press-Informer, a Hireling of "Paymaster" Lyttelton, and what not—took especial delight throughout 1749 and thereafter in representing the Bow Street magistrate as an utterly corrupt "Trading Justice." The following doggerel from the issue of January 7, 1749, will serve for a sample:

Now in the ancient shop at Bow
(He advertises it for show)
He signs the missive Warrant
The midnight Wh-re and Thief to catch
He sends the Constable and Watch
Expert upon the errand.

⁸ Thomas Hull's *Select Letters between the late Duchess of Somerset, Lady Luxborough, and Others*, London, 1778, I, 85.

⁹ Lady Luxborough's *Letters . . . to Shenstone*, London, 1775, p. 369 (Letter CIII, December 21, 1753).

¹⁰ The "fiat" is dated July 30, 1748; on October 25 Fielding received his "commission"; and by December he was performing his duties as a magistrate.

¹¹ See, for example, the following dates: April 23, July 9, and August 27.

From hence he comfortably draws
 Subsistence out of every cause
 For dinner and a bottle.
 God shield old *Argus* from his shop
 Lest he should fairly truss him up
 At Clerkenwell or Tottle.

Who would be righted of his wrong
 To woB Street let him come along
 His Worship there is willing
 To cut and shuffle forth the laws
 With nostrils snuff'd and Bacco jaws
 And take your solid shilling.

Long before *Tom Jones* was published, "Old Argus" had got wind of what Fielding was doing and had begun his attack. As early as September 5, 1748, we find a "communication" to the editor of *Old England* which reads: "You . . . have detected his [Fielding's] Ignorance in Grammar, his false English and his Meanness of Language. You have also shown his unacquaintance with Law . . . tho' he boasts so loud of his knowledge that way and of his being brought to bed soon of a Law-Book . . . which is to be published at the same time with six volumes of his novels spick and span new fronted with special dedications. . . . An odd sort of Author this, a kind of Jack of all Trades and would-be Humorist, a Farce maker, a Journal Scribbler and Mock Lawyer, a Novel Framer."

Meanwhile, *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild* were not forgotten. On November 12, 1748, *Old England* endeavored to turn the legal profession against their fellow member by charging that in *Joseph Andrews* Fielding had abused in particular "the Gentlemen of our Inns of Court," whom he "brands with being the very Affectation of Affectation."¹² "But what could you expect," asks the journalist, "from a person who set out so meanly with Merry-Andrew Tricks and Pickleherring wit, and ever noted for vulgarisms and homeli-

¹² *Joseph Andrews*, Book III, chapter iii.

ness of Expressions in every scene of life? Who even in his own boasted way of Humour is at best low, imperfect and dwindling into wretched Buffoonery and Farce. . . . The outcast of the Playhouse, the Refuse of the Booksellers, the Jest of Authors and the Contempt of every ingenious reader."

A fortnight later (November 26, 1748), on the occasion of the discontinuance of *The Jacobite's Journal*, not only *Joseph Andrews* but *Jonathan Wild* as well was befouled in that oft-quoted doggerel epitaph which runs:

Beneath this stone
Lies Trotplaid John
His length of chin and nose
His crazy brain
Unhum'rous vein
In verse and eke in prose.

Some plays he wrote
Sans wit or plot
Adventures of inferiors¹³
Which with his Lives¹³
Of Rogues and Thieves . . .

The remaining seven lines, which rake the jakes of nastiness, are now unprintable. They were diligently reproduced, nevertheless, both in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and in *The London Magazine*, the two chief periodicals of the day; and this unsavory lampoon—which everybody read—turned the laugh not only on Fielding and his unfortunate periodical but also upon two excellent works of fiction.

During the course of the attack on Fielding as a "Trading J.st.ce" in the *Old England* of January 7, 1749 (from which a quotation has already been given) the vigilant "Argus" again fell foul of *Jonathan Wild* and again warned his readers of what they might expect in *Tom Jones*. "A spice of Humour run up" into buffoonery "interspersed" through Fielding's

¹³ The allusions are to *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews* and *The Life of Jonathan Wild*.

"works" has "denoted him well qualified to fill up W.rr.nts. Nor was a knack of Old Baily Biography accounted in the least to fall short of it especially if the Author . . . had a good hand at spinning out a novel on a Foundling story to six volumes." Abuse of Fielding's novels, as well as of their author and of everything connected with him, ran riot in the columns of his enemies. It could hardly fail of having an injurious effect upon his reputation as a novelist, not only among those who were antagonistic or indifferent, but also among those who were in general sufficiently well disposed. Constant iteration of the charge that *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild* were mere "Buffoonery" and "Old Baily Biography" must have kept many of his contemporaries from rating those admirable fictions at their true value; and the contemptuous references to the forthcoming *Tom Jones* were unquestionably prejudicial to an unbiased estimate—presumably this work also would consist of "low" scenes, "discouraging to Virtue and detrimental to Religion."

II

In spite of Fielding's antagonists, however, there can be no doubt of the immediate literary excitement caused by *Tom Jones* when, after so many delays, it finally appeared (in February, 1749). Within the interval of two years which elapsed between its publication and that of *Amelia* (1751) the popularity of Fielding's masterpiece is attested by unimpeachable evidence, not the least important of which is furnished by his many and bitter enemies. A book may be popular, of course, without being justly assessed or generally commended by the majority of those who are considered competent in literature; but no one can question the fact that *Tom Jones* had a "vast run" in England, nor, despite Richardson's statement to the contrary, that its popularity during the period of two years which we are now investigating continued to increase. It is true that the abuse which had previously been visited upon Fielding by his political antagonists was kept up with unabated

vigor after the publication of *Tom Jones*, and that it broke forth with especial violence and scurrility after the publication of *Amelia*. Moreover, following the appearance of *Tom Jones* their onslaughts were supplemented by the untiring efforts of the jealous Richardson and his numerous adherents. But a marked difference is to be observed between the attacks upon *Tom Jones* and those which were aimed at *Joseph Andrews* or *Amelia*; Fielding's enemies, who only turned up their noses at *Joseph Andrews* and who ridiculed *Amelia* as a failure, were practically unanimous in admitting the vogue of *Tom Jones*.

As we trace the fortunes of this novel in the years immediately following its publication, we are amazed at the amount, the variety, and the persistency of antagonism directed at its author. None of the great English novelists has ever been so savagely and so continuously manhandled—Fielding's success was a bitter draught for his truculent assailants. There can be no question about the immediate popular interest in his book: on February 28, 1749, Millar declared in his advertisement that it was "impossible to get Sets bound fast enough to answer the Demand"; his patrons might "have them sew'd in Blue Papers and Boards."¹⁴ Whether or not this statement (as in the case of *Amelia*) was a bookseller's trick, the demand for *Tom Jones* was unquestionably great; before the end of the year 1749 there were as many as four London editions and one Dublin edition of the novel.¹⁵

What report was made respectively by the two chief magazines of the age—*The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The London Magazine*—concerning the new production? The difference is striking. In February, the month in which *Tom Jones* appeared, *The London Magazine* gave Fielding the place of honor by devoting to his novel its four opening pages; while the February number of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which contains a "Plan and Specimens" (and the "Epilogue" as

¹⁴ *The General Advertiser*, February 28, 1749.

¹⁵ Cross, II, 121-123; III, 316-317.

well) of Johnson's play *Irene*, carefully avoids—except for the mere title in the "Register" of new publications—all mention of Fielding's book. Since the materials of *The Gentleman's Magazine* were (according to a subsequent editor, John Nichols)¹⁶ as early as 1747 "frequently, if not constantly" superintended by Johnson (who was always pro-Richardson and anti-Fielding), the omission need not surprise us.

The coldness of *The Gentleman's Magazine* was counterbalanced, however, by the heartiness of the *London*, which did its best to launch *Tom Jones* appropriately. The suggestion has been made by Professor Cross that the review in question may have been prepared beforehand from an advance copy, and perhaps even arranged for by Pitt or by Lyttelton himself. This may well have been the case, for *The London Magazine*, owned by Thomas Astley, supported the party in power, and would therefore be friendly to the novelist; moreover, *Tom Jones* was not actually published until the last of February, the month in which the article appeared.¹⁷ Whatever may have been the motive that inspired it and whoever wrote it, the account in *The London Magazine* must have been most gratifying to Fielding; the "polite part of the Town," and, for that matter, of the entire Kingdom could not escape hearing about a novel which was already giving the readers of the *London* "great amusement, and, we hope Instruction."

The main part of the review is devoted to a "short abstract," which is to "serve as an incitement" to those who "have not yet had the pleasure" of reading the book; and preceding and following the abstract are commendatory paragraphs of characterization. This "novel, or prose epick composition," writes the critic, with his eye on Fielding's preface, is "calculated to recommend religion and virtue, to shew the bad consequences of indiscretion, and to set several kinds of vice in their most deformed and shocking light." Like "all such good compositions," it "consists of a principal history, and a great many

¹⁶ Nichols's "Prefatory Introduction" to the "General Index" of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, London, 1821, III, xlii.

¹⁷ Cross, II, 129-130.

episodes or incidents; all which arise naturally from the subject, and contribute towards carrying on the chief plot or design. Through the whole, the reader's attention is always kept awake by some new surprizing accident, and his curiosity upon the stretch, to discover the effects of that accident, so that . . . it is difficult to leave off before having read the whole." In conclusion the writer says: "Thus ends this pretty novel, with a most just distribution of rewards and punishments, according to the merits of all the persons that had any considerable share in it." Not a word of adverse criticism is to be found in this review; its author's only regret is that he has had to omit "many of the surprizing incidents" of the narrative, and that he cannot give "any of them in their beautiful dress."¹⁸

While *The London Magazine* extended this cordial welcome, the *Gentleman's* maintained a frigid silence. But Fielding's engaging novel was not to be put down; as the months went by, even surly Mr. Urban was compelled to acknowledge its existence. The involuntary recognition which is uncovered by a close examination of succeeding numbers of *The Gentleman's Magazine* is excellent proof of the headway the book continued to make in the years 1749-1750.

The first notice which Mr. Urban deigned to take of *Tom Jones* appeared (March, 1749) in the form of a footnote to an Extract from the Rev. Edward Cobden's sermon on "A Persuasive to Chastity." For a picture of the misery attendant upon vice the editor refers his readers to the "most lively and striking picture" furnished by Smollett's Miss Williams in *Roderick Random*; and then adds: "Some strokes of this kind appear also in *Tom Jones*, and in Mrs. Philips's *Apology*. . . . However, the loose images in these pieces perhaps incite to vice more strongly than the contrast figures alarm us into virtue."¹⁹ One can imagine the smile of Mr. Urban's editor as he put Fielding's great work in the same category as the *Apology* of the notorious Mrs. Phillips!

¹⁸ *The London Magazine*, XVIII, 51-55 (February, 1749).

¹⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX, 126 (March, 1749).

After this slap at the novelist, April, May, June, and July went by, and not a word about *Tom Jones* was permitted to enter the columns of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Meanwhile, Fielding's book was becoming the talk of the town. Rave as he might in the columns of *Old England* against that motley "History of Bastardism, Fornication, and Adultery"; and predict as he might that readers would turn from their "airy Banquet" of "Whip-Sillabub," Old Argus the Hundred-Eyed was forced to admit that "the Public" had "greedily caught at it" and that it was already a "celebrated Production."²⁰

Finally, when (in August) *The Gentleman's Magazine* broke its long silence, it was to print an excerpt from the *Old England* of August 5, in which, during the course of an extended tirade on Fielding as a Press-Informer, a Trading Justice, and even a Highwayman, the inveterate "Aretine" characterized Fielding's hero as "that renowned bastard *Tom Jones*."²¹ As was to be expected, this attack on Fielding was given by Mr. Urban a generous amount of space; but even greater space was devoted to "A Critical Account of *Clarissa* . . . Translated from the French," which, overflowing the June number, occupied four more eulogistic pages in August—praise that the editor transcribes with great pleasure and hopes "our readers will share this pleasure with us."²² Regarding *Tom Jones*, on the other hand, the editor himself maintains his usual taciturnity; but somehow or other there appeared in the issue a tribute in verse addressed to Henry Fielding by a certain "Tho.[mas] Cawthorn," "*On reading his inimitable History of Tom Jones*." Indifferent though the lines are, they voice a genuine appreciation of Fielding's realism:

Long, thro' the mimic scenes of motley life,
Neglected *Nature* lost th' unequal strife; . . .
When *Genius* spoke: Let *Fielding* take the pen!
Life dropt her mask, and all mankind were men.²³

²⁰ *Old England*, May 27, 1749.

²¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX, 366-367.

²² *Ibid.*, XIX, 245 (June, 1749).

²³ *Ibid.*, XIX, 371 (August, 1749).

How this stowaway compliment managed to creep into the Poet's Corner, nobody knows; possibly Mr. Urban was misled as to the identity of the author. There *was* a Cawthorn—James, not Thomas—the master of the Grammar School at Tunbridge, who did enough in the poetic way to be included, a generation later, by Dr. Johnson among his Poets. One may imagine the perturbation of that good dominie when the news got around that *he* was the author of this tribute to *Tom Jones*. In October, Mr. Urban took pains to inform the public that the verses in question "*were not written*"²⁴ by James the Schoolmaster. The laugh was now turned against Fielding himself, whose Grub Street enemies were not slow in making capital of the episode.²⁵

On careful scrutiny, the September number of the *Gentleman's* reveals another reference in verse to *Tom Jones*. In a poem entitled "The Patriot," quoted from *The Westminster Journal* of August 19, the statement is made that

Ev'n Allen might survive without romance.

Lest his readers should miss the force of this compliment to the worthy Ralph Allen, the editor supplied the following note, "*Supposed to be shadowed in the character of Allworthy, by the author of Tom Jones.*"²⁶ In less than a twelvemonth, then, *Tom Jones* had become so much talked of that an editor could not afford to crush out every reference to it. Thus, in the December number, a communication about altering the Book of Common Prayer—a subject over which there was a heated discussion in 1749-1750—takes the shape of a debate between Allworthy and Western,²⁷ in which, by the way, the Squire's language retains its original flavor! Finally, in the emblematic frontispiece to the completed volume (1749), to

²⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX, 464.

²⁵ *An Examen of the History of Tom Jones*, London, 1750, p. 118 note. Though the title-page reads "1750," the book was listed in December, 1749 (*Lond. Mag.*, p. 580; *Gent. Mag.*, p. 576).

²⁶ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX, 422 (September, 1749).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XIX, 547-550.

use the words of Austin Dobson, who first called attention to the matter, Fielding's novel "appears under *Clarissa* . . . sharing with that work a possibly unintended proximity to a sprig of laurel stuck in a bottle of Nantes . . . amongst a pile of the books of the year."²⁸

By the winter of 1749-1750 the appellations "Tom Jones" and "Sophia" had acquired something of that popularity which, in a subsequent age, was responsible for "Pickwick" cigars and other Pickwickian commodities. Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson's beloved "Incognita," had heard so much of Fielding's book that she was "fatigued" with the very name. She has lately "fallen into the company of several young ladies" who have "each a Tom Jones in some part of the world, for so they call their favourites"; and, in like manner, "the gentlemen have their Sophias." A friend of hers told her he must show her "his Sophia, the sweetest creature in the world, and immediately produced a Dutch mastiff puppy."²⁹

The vogue of *Tom Jones* was now conceded by some of Fielding's bitterest antagonists; in fact, so "much Notice" had "been taken of this Performance as an *inimitable* one," that a certain "Orbilius" was impelled to prepare a counterblast over a hundred pages in length, the celebrated *Examen of Tom Jones*,³⁰ one of the most singular productions imaginable. Among the various hostile "examens" of the day—and the *genre* was then popular—no other can excel in minuteness this lengthy broadside. *Seriatim* and *in extenso*, Orbilius points out the innumerable "faults" of Fielding's "chaotic History," which he declares is both immoral and irreligious; chapter by chapter, page by page, he damns—with the particularity of a medieval anathema—the incidents, the characters, the descriptions, the observations, and the style. Apropos of the number

²⁸ Dobson's *Fielding*, London, 1883, p. 136.

²⁹ *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, IV, 280-281. This letter, undated, precedes another letter of hers of December 16, 1749.

³⁰ *An Examen of the History of Tom Jones . . . Proper to be bound with the Foundling*, London, 1750.

A N
E X A M E N
O F T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F

TOM JONES, a Foundling.

Parturiunt Montes: nascetur ridiculus —

HOR.

The Product of *his* Toil and Sweating,
A BASTARD of *his* own Begetting. SWIFT.

In TWO LETTERS to a FRIEND.

P, per to be bound with the Foundling.



L O N D O N:
Printed for W. OWEN, near Temple-Bar.
M,DCC,L.

of inns which are described in *Tom Jones*, he includes the "following Epigram":

Herodotus and Thou, O Fielding! *claim*
 (Tho' Critics snarl) *an equal Share of Fame.*
The NINE support his wondrous Mass of Glory:
Thou equal'st him in INNS—if not in STORY.

Accusing Fielding of plagiarism, he cites the parallel between Partridge and Smollett's Strap, who he supposes have "been lathered in the same basin." The plot he characterizes as a tissue of "Inconsistency and Improbability"; Sophia is "trash"; Jones is a "stinking Hero"; and the novel as a whole is "our filthy Author's" "fetid Foundling." "Were not the prevailing Character of this Age *Lewdness*, Mr. F. would never have found readers enough in high life to take off his numerous Editions." Who could have gone to all this trouble? No one knows for certain the name of Fielding's assailant; but the individual best equipped for the task must have been someone connected with the abusive *Old England*. The author, as Professor Cross has observed, "repeated, sometimes quoting them, the blunders that 'Aretine' had discovered in 'Tom Jones,' advertised his 'Examen' in 'Old England' along with the satires of 'Porcupinus Pelagius,' and surely had the hundred eyes of 'Argus Centoculi.'" ⁸¹ In the *Old England* of December 9 the *Examen* was offered to the public as an *exposé* of "the bad morals, unnatural descriptions, inconsistencies, improbabilities, impertinent shew of learning, and false pretensions of wit, of that droll performance [*Tom Jones*]." And, close upon the heels of this notice (December 16), "Argus Centoculi" pressed on with the editorial statement: "'Tis whispered about, that . . . [Fielding] is under a most sensible Mortification from an *Examen* into his *Foundling*, which has lately been published . . . unravelling all his Characters, proving them weak, immoral, wicked, trifling and out of Nature." But the most significant passage is the following, which furnishes an interesting corroboration—in low life—

⁸¹ Cross's *Fielding*, II, 153-154.

of Lady Bradshaigh's testimony regarding the vogue of Fielding's book. The *Examen*, predicts Old Argus, will render this popular novel so contemptible that the girls of easy virtue "will hardly for the future be so very fond of calling their Pensioners by the name of *Tom Jones*, nor the Fribbles their Harlots by that of *Sophia*."³²

Argus of the Hundred Eyes was, however, a better detective than he was a prophet—if we may believe the author of the "Considerable Additions" to the "Second Edition" of the celebrated *Apology for the Life of Mr. Bampfylde-Moore Carew*. In an address to the reader, dated "February 10, 1750," Mr. Thomas Jones is characterized as "that most renowned and shining Character of the Age," whose "History" is in "every Hand, from the beardless Youth up to the Hoary Hairs of Age." Not that the "historiographer," as he called himself, was one of Fielding's eulogists—far from it; for though in his "Additions" to the *Apology* he was obviously trading upon that writer's fame, he made them, at the same time, the vehicle of abuse. After a hostile preface addressed "To the Worshipful Henry Fielding," in which he parodied the dedication of *Tom Jones*, ridiculed its author's "strange Metamorphosis" into a justice of the peace, accused him of borrowing witticisms from the *Cambridge Jest Book*, and made game of the manner in which he had "so delicately ragoo'd, hash'd, and forc'd Human Nature," the historiographer proceeded—by making alterations in the body of the story—to work out at length an impudent "parallel" between Fielding's hero and Carew, King of the Vagabonds; and, as a final stroke of insolence, appended to the whole a scurrilous

³² By the well-disposed *Monthly Review* the abusive *Examen* was not allowed to go unchallenged. Admitting that the "anonymous" pamphleteer, whose chief "talent" is "scurrility," has pointed out "some real faults in the *Foundling*," he insists that these imperfections in a work "chiefly calculated for entertainment," wherein "so many beauties are continually flowing," are "beneath the notice" of anyone; and declares that the contemptuous would-be critic "has nothing of the gentleman about him."—*The Monthly Review*, II, 93 (December, 1749).

résumé entitled "The full and true History of Tom Jones, a Foundling; without Patterning." In edition after edition—for *The Apology*, which really was interesting, continued to be exceptionally popular—the objectionable matter relating to Fielding was, in whole or in part, parveyed to a multitude of readers; indeed, so profitable was this feature of the book in the eyes of its publishers that it was not entirely discarded for over a quarter of a century after the novelist's death.²² Needless to say, the reputation of *Tom Jones* was not improved by this protracted and undecided association with so notorious a scoundrel. But for the light it throws upon the early vogue of Fielding's novel, the "Second Edition" of the *Apology* is a document of considerable importance. Whether regarded as a counterblast against Fielding or as a device by which to trade upon his fame as a novelist—and it was undoubtedly both—the inclusion of so much matter concerning *Tom Jones* is excellent evidence of the popularity which, by February, 1759, that work had attained even in the opinion of a hostile "historiographer."

For a full year *The Gentleman's Magazine* had kept out of its columns any actual review of Fielding's novel. Meanwhile, *Tom Jones* had become so much a topic of the day that at last, after the appearance of the French translation (by M. de la Place), interest triumphed over inclination, and the editors thought best to include a short account and critique of the book in their March number. This review took the form of an unsigned "*Literary Article from Paris*,"²³ which purported to have been written by a Frenchman. In view of their long recalcitrancy, it is no less surprising than significant that the editors, whose only comment on *Tom Jones* at the time of its publication had been that "the loose images" in such a book "perhaps incite to vice more strongly than the contrast figures alarm us into virtue," should allow the following praise of so vicious a production:

²² Of the numerous editions, many of which are in the Dickson Collection at Yale, it is unnecessary to speak in detail.

²³ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XX, 117-118 (March, 1759).

"The public has not for a long time been entertain'd with a piece where the principal persons are more engaging or more interesting, the episodes better connected with the principal action, the characters more equally sustained, the incidents more artfully prepared, or more naturally arising one out of another. Miss *Western* is a truly admirable character; *Tom Jones*, as much a libertine as he is, engages all sensible hearts by his candor, generosity, humanity, his gratitude to his benefactors, his tender compassion, and readiness to assist the distressed. The name of *Alworthy*, which in *English* signifies *supereminently good*, could never be more justly bestow'd than on the respectable uncle of *Jones*. The character of *Bliſſ*, in opposition to that of the *Foundling*, presents us with an admirable contrast, and is dress'd up with singular art. The author has employ'd no less skill about his other characters, in assigning to every one his station and business, so that, among so great a number, they all, except one, appear necessary to the action."

Along with this commendation went a number of strictures. Fielding was scored for "imitating the manner of *Cervantes*, *Scarron*, and *le Sage*, in the titles of his chapters"; and his translator, who (to use his own words) by suppressing "all sorts of digressions, dissertations," and "moral touches" had reduced the size of the original production from six volumes to four, was advised "to make some more retrenchments" when he came "to give a second edition of his translation." But the main charges against *Tom Jones* concerned the "loose manners" of the "hero" and the "resolute boldness with which Miss *Western* abandons her father's house." It was intimated, indeed, that "the love of liberty in the English" rendered them "generally more disposed" than the French "to forgive the disobedience of a daughter"; but Fielding's statement in his preface to the effect that the "strictest regard to religion and virtue" had been observed in his novel could only be justified by a special definition of terms:—"We must here suppose that, by *virtue*, M. *Fielding* would not have us understand a rigorous observation of all the precepts in the christian

system of morality, but only the practice of the principal offices of justice and humanity."

Of La Place's unfortunate rendering of Fielding's great novel no extended account is necessary here. Translation it is not—as everyone knows—but rather an indifferent abridgement, in which by casting out "*toute espèce de Digressions, de Dissertations, ou de Traité de Morale,*" the translator utterly despoiled and denatured the splendid *comédie humaine* which, he professes, has charmed him to such a degree that it was impossible for him to "*résister à la tentation*" to put it into French, and the author of which he so greatly admires though he has never seen him. *This Tom Jones*—deprived of the glory and even of the essential character of its original—was the one most commonly used in other countries besides France; for most foreign translators La Place's French was an easier job to tackle than Fielding's English. Despite all misfortunes, however, *Tom Jones* was much more popular in France than has often been supposed; and, though the enthusiasm for the book in that country fell short of the raptures which attended the advent of *Clarissa*, it was so considerable that the news of it was influential in increasing the reputation of its author at home.³⁵

Oddly enough, Fate, which played so many ironical tricks on Fielding, put a temporary block in the path of La Place's version. It was an unexpected pleasure for *Old England* to print, in its issue of April 7, 1750, the following translation of an item of news which had appeared in the French periodical *A-la-Main* of March 16:

An Arrêt of the Council of State is issued for suppressing a certain immoral Work, entitled The History of TOM JONES, translated from the *English*.

This interesting paragraph did not escape the eye of Mr. Urban, who, while including (as we have seen) a review of

³⁵ For La Place's remarks, see the "Traduction d'une Lettre" (first written to Fielding in English) which serves as an introduction to Vol. I of the *Histoire de Tom Jones, ou l'Enfant Trouvé*, London ("Chez Jean Nourse"), 1750.

the French version, vented his spleen against Fielding by insinuating in a footnote that the words "Chez Jean Nourse" on La Place's title-page were a bookseller's trick, and by calling the attention of his readers to the fact that "Since the writing of this article, the edition . . . has been suppressed." This does not end the story of jubilation on the part of Mr. Urban and Argus Centoculi; but it is now time to speak of Samuel Richardson, whose delight was even greater than theirs. Rejoicing over his rival's misfortune, he wrote to J. B. Defreval in Paris (January 21, 1750, O.S.), "Tom Jones is a dissolute book. Its run is over, even with us. Is it true, that France had virtue enough to refuse a license for such a profligate performance?"³⁶ Presumably the "arrêt" was operative only a short time; at any rate, Defreval seems to have known nothing of the matter. His reply is as follows: "I am sorry to say it, but you do my countrymen more honour than they truly deserve, in surmising that they had virtue enough to refuse a license to *Tom Jones*; I think it a profligate performance upon your pronouncing it such, for I have not read the piece, though much extolled; but it has had a vast run here this good while, and considering how things go on, I don't believe there is now a book dissolute enough to be refused admittance among us."³⁷

That *Tom Jones* enjoyed "a vast run" in France during the year 1750 is amply substantiated by the testimony of other literary persons besides Defreval; the *arrêt*, of which he had not heard, was, nevertheless, a matter of record. Why should the French refuse a license to *Tom Jones*? Were they really shocked by the immorality of the hero and the runaway propensities of the heroine? Who knows? But the following explanation which is given by so competent an authority as the Marquis d'Argenson, though hitherto disregarded by Fielding's biographers, deserves serious consideration. D'Argenson, who found "rien que de vertueux dans ce petit roman anglais,"

³⁶ *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, V, 275.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, V, 276-277 (April 17, 1751).

gives the following account (March 28, 1750): "Rollin, imprimeur de *Tom-Jones* a été condamné à l'amende et le livre supprimé par arrêt du conseil, . . . mais l'ouvrier a manqué d'attention à M. Maboul, maître des requêtes chargé par M. le chancelier du district de la librairie, et Maboul est bien un autre ouvrier."³⁸ In other words, the French *Tom Jones* bore the brunt of a private quarrel. The vogue of the book when it finally appeared cannot be doubted: "After 'Gulliver' and 'Pamela,'" exclaims the Marquis d'Argenson, "here comes 'Tom Jones,' and they are mad for him."³⁹

One of the notable critics that hastened to read La Place's version was the celebrated *littérateur* Grimm, who had been greatly impressed by the success which *Tom Jones* was enjoying in London. In the spring of 1750, some "douze ou quinze mois" after the appearance of the first English edition, Grimm testifies to the fact that "Cet ouvrage, de M. Fielding, y [*i.e.*, in London] eut le succès le plus prodigieux."⁴⁰ The English "original" he has not yet seen; but of La Place's translation he writes as follows: "Quoique le traducteur ait resserré l'ouvrage, il se trouve encore trop long. Les caractères y sont assez bien peints et assez variés, mais la multitude des personnages cause une espèce de confusion. L'intérêt qu'on doit prendre aux deux héros du roman est affaibli par celui qu'on veut que je prenne à des personnages subalternes. Une autre chose mal entendue encore, ce sont les infidélités que Jones fait à sa maîtresse." Then comes the real objection to the book—Fielding's lack of elegance. "Les détails bas de l'ouvrage peuvent plaire aux Anglais," writes Grimm, "mais ils déplaisent souverainement à nos dames. J'ignore si l'original, que je n'ai point vu, est bien écrit, mais la traduction est assez souvent gothique.

³⁸ *Journal . . . du Marquis D'Argenson*, Paris, 1864, VI, 182.

³⁹ Jusserand, J., *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*, London and New York, 1890, Introduction, p. 24; quoted from *Mémoires et Journal inédit du Marquis d'Argenson*, Paris, 1857, 5 vols., vol. V, "Remarques en lisant," No. 1832.

⁴⁰ *Correspondance Littéraire*, Paris, 1877, I, 410.

On ne peut guère faire bien et faire vite." As time went on, Grimm, we shall see, thought more and more highly of Fielding and often praised him; but his greater enthusiasm was reserved for Richardson,⁴¹ whom he ranked with Homer, Sophocles, and Raphael,⁴² and whose *Clarissa* was "peut-être l'ouvrage le plus surprenant qui soit jamais sorti des mains d'hommes."⁴³

Perhaps the most famous person whose attention was attracted by the vogue of *Tom Jones* was Prince Charles Edward, the Pretender, then in France, against whose expeditions Fielding had directed his banter in *The Jacobite's Journal*. On May 18, 1750, the Prince requested Mlle. Ferrand to send him from Paris *Joseph Andrews* in both French and English and *Tom Jones* in French.⁴⁴ "In *Tom Jones*," writes Andrew Lang, "he may have been amused by the adventures of Sophia when mistaken for Jenny Cameron, and by the festive and futile Jacobitism of Squire Western. Even so good a Whig as Fielding would have been pleased, had he known that his books were assuaging the melancholy seclusion of 'the Young Pretender.'"⁴⁵

The *arrêt* of La Place's translation of *Tom Jones* was, indeed, temporary and of no intrinsic importance; but in the hands of Fielding's many enemies in England it became a somewhat effective weapon. *The Gentleman's Magazine* did not expatiate upon the matter in its own name, but it was

⁴¹ *Correspondance Littéraire*, III, 161; IV, 24-25; V, 23.

⁴² Hill, G. B., *Writers and Readers*, New York and London, 1892, p. 86.

⁴³ *Corr. Lit.*, I, 14.

⁴⁴ Andrew Lang, *Pickle the Spy*, London, 1897, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁵ Lang's *Prince Charles Edward*, London, etc., 1900, p. 240. Fielding would have been interested to know that another book of his was read by the Empress Catherine II of Russia. "If I ever write a comedy," she declared, "I shall certainly not take the *Mariage de Figaro* as a model, for, after *Jonathan Wild*, I have never found myself in such bad company."—K. Waliszewski, *The Romance of an Empress*, New York, 1905, p. 337.

pleased in its April (1750) number to call attention to *Old England's* attack of the seventh of that month. The passage runs as follows: "Here the writer [in *Old England*] . . . brings in *Tom Jones*, . . . observing that the *French* have shewn wisdom by suppressing that book, which to our shame was greedily swallowed here, (though wrote against)." ⁴⁶ Once more Fielding's enemies were compelled to admit that *Tom Jones* had been "greedily swallowed" by his countrymen.

In turning current events to account in blackening a man's reputation, however, modern journalism itself must bow before the following master stroke of ingenuity on the part of *Old England*; namely, the endeavor to class *Tom Jones* among those obscene books which, according to Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London, were in part responsible for the famous earthquake shocks in England during the year 1750. In a *Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants* of the city the Bishop had exclaimed, "Have not histories or romances of the vilest prostitutes been published, intended merely to display the most execrable scenes of lewdness!" ⁴⁷ What books were in the Bishop's mind we cannot positively say. Judging from the advertisements then current in the periodicals, there had been for some time in London an especially severe epidemic of obscene pamphlets; and among the longer fictions which were particularly popular was Defoe's *Roxana; or, the Fortunate Mistress*. Whatever Sherlock may have thought of *Tom Jones*, it is not clear that he specifically referred to the book. But Fielding's enemies took advantage of the opportunity offered and denounced the novel as one of the many libidinous productions which, in the opinion of the Bishop of London, were a contributory cause of the recent seismic manifestations of Divine displeasure toward "a sinful people." Along with the account of the stay of Fielding's book in France, *Old England*, in its issue of April 7, 1750, made a citation from the Bishop's *Letter* regarding "lewd books," and expressed a hope that the

⁴⁶ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XX, 177.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XX, 124 (March, 1750), from an "Abstract" of the *Letter*.

English, following the example of the French, would suppress *Tom Jones* by an act of Parliament. Thus might the Kingdom be relieved of the terror of future earthquakes.

This attack on Fielding was duly reported in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for April, 1750;⁴⁸ but the undoubted popularity of *Tom Jones* could not be utterly neglected. In the same number the score was given for "TOM JONES; A Dance," which under a slightly different caption had appeared several months before in *The London Magazine*.⁴⁹ Even Fielding's inveterate enemy, William Kenrick, was obliged to admit the vogue of *Tom Jones*. In a pamphlet called *The Scandalizade*, which appeared⁵⁰ in April, 1750, he abuses Fielding's hero as "Puff'd Trotplaid's iniquitous Son of a Whore" and denounces Lyttelton, who was responsible for the "puffing":

Tom Jones and St. P——! can a Writer so nice
In his Objects of Virtue, commend to us Vice?
'Tis Nature, forsooth! and must bear a great Price.⁵¹

Yet in the attack on Cibber, which follows, Fielding's success is implied in the lines:

But I see thour't inclining to old Parent Earth,
Thy Fame, in Appeal, to Posterity yielding,
Thy Bronze to thy Son, and thy Lawrel to F—d—g.⁵²

In the May number of *The Gentleman's Magazine* another bit of testimony to the fame of *Tom Jones* found its way into a footnote to one of the "Poetical Essays." In a "Dialogue" between "Mitio and Demea," ostensibly on the subject of

⁴⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XX, 177.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XX, 179 (April, 1750); and *The London Magazine*, January, 1750, p. 41.

⁵⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XX, 192 (April, 1750).

⁵¹ From *The Scandalizade*, as reprinted in *Remarkable Satires*, London, 1760, p. 104. The reference is to Lyttelton's defense of St. Paul.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

"Panegyric" but really upon affairs in Ireland, Demea ironically cuts short Mitio's praise of his hero by saying:

Haste to *France*;
There learn to dress an hero in *romance* . . .
Make honest *Jones* a minister of state,
Doubtless, that Phantom will reform the *great*.

To this passage the author supplies the following note: "*An ill-natured Sarcasm, from peevish Demea: for none, but an ignorant and pretending Sign dawber, would presume to make alterations in a most celebrated and complete original.*"⁵³ The allusion is, of course, to La Place's villainous *rifacimento* of *Tom Jones*.

The June issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* furnishes inadvertently more evidence of the stir which Fielding's novel continued to create. A certain critic who signs himself "T. P.," falling foul of Warburton's edition of Shakespeare, exclaims: "Granting . . . that the greatest treasure of critical learning [Warburton's edition] that ever was offer'd to the world is, at present, thrown by as rubbish; will it be any great wonder to a man, that considers how the world is run a madding after that fool parson *Adams*, and that rake *Tom Jones*?" "But the time will shortly come," adds the ironical "T. P.," "when these trifles shall vanish in smoak, and the best edition of Shakespeare shall shine forth in all its glory."⁵⁴

Thus during the winter of 1749 and far along into the spring and summer of 1750, hardly an issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* (unfriendly as it was) appeared that did not contain some slight reflection of the popularity of *Tom Jones*. And, as might be expected, *Joseph Andrews* enjoyed with its successor the sunshine of greater public notice than ever before. True, it was not always commended. A writer in *The Student* for January 20, 1750, had heard Parson Adams so "highly condemn'd" ("because, it seems, he *knew not the world*") and had found so "many" divines of "the same opinion" that he

⁵³ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XX, 229 (May, 1750).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XX, 252.

took pains to defend that "laudable and agreeable figure."⁵⁵ *Joseph Andrews*, then, could also boast of champions, not a few of whom preferred it to *Tom Jones*—but of that something will be said later on. It is now time to leave the company of surly Mr. Urban and of the "envious Kenrick"; of vile Orbilius and the abusive King of the Beggars; of sneering Aretine and scurrilous Argus and the venomous Porcupines of the Sea—and pass to a better chapter; but, as we do so, it may be observed that when a man's popularity is conceded by his enemies there must be a good basis for such an admission.

III

Meanwhile, Fielding's fame as a novelist had been making its imprint upon the minor fiction of the day; to trade upon the vogue of *Tom Jones* by imitation, quotation, and reference became a regular practice. And since the most obvious thing for a hackwriter to do was to tell the story of Fielding's hero and heroine *after* the marriage, there appeared anonymously before the year was over (November, 1749) a *History of Tom Jones the Foundling, in his Married State*.⁵⁶ This publication—merely a bookseller's job—demands no extended notice here. In a facetious preface, which contains the only humor in the novel, the writer informs the public that "HENRY FIELDING, Esq; is not the Author of this Book, nor in any Manner concerned in its Composition or Publication." The author might have spared his pains; for, as *The Monthly Review* pointed out at the time, this narrative is utterly lacking in Fielding's "spirit, style, or invention."

Except for the naming of the characters, one could hardly have guessed that *Tom Jones in his Married State* was related in any way to its great original. But it was not long before there appeared an actual imitation of a Fielding novel—at least of its external characteristics. This was *The History of*

⁵⁵ *The Student, or the Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany*, 1751, II, 178.

⁵⁶ Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX, 528.

Charlotte Summers, the Fortunate Parish Girl (listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in February, 1750), which, claiming to be the "first Begotten, of the poetical Issue, of the much celebrated Biographer of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*," professes to "mimic every Action" of "that facetious Gentleman."⁵⁷ In page after page of thin and somewhat tedious interpolated foolery the author elaborates upon Fielding's "Bill of Fare," his "Books and Chapters," and his "nodding Places" for refreshment. The prolegomenous chapter to Vol. I, Book II, for example, is a "Dissertation on the Art of Laughing and Crying," in which are compared the "two Inimitable Moderns," Fielding and Richardson, the former of whom "tickled me till I had like to die of laughing," and the latter "moved me so I had like to have died crying."⁵⁸ On the whole this novel, though widely read at the time, has little interest now except as a tribute to Fielding's reputation as the inventor of a new *genre* of fiction, and as evidence of the lack of success of his would-be imitators in matters of humor and wisdom.

Two months after the appearance of *Charlotte Summers* came *The Adventures of Mr. Loveill, Interspers'd with many real Amours of the Modern Polite World*.⁵⁹ According to the preface, "*A Motive extremely different from that of the whole race of modern writers of Memoirs, from the author of TOM JONES, down to the gentleman who has lately favoured us with the History of Charlotte Summers*" has inspired this work. "Those celebrated performances have all been written from the same source, the summons of the vacant pocket; these from the overflowings of an honest, and an injured heart . . . 'tis a woman who writes . . . and in many cases an angry woman." As a matter of fact the author was not a woman, angry or otherwise, but the famous charlatan, Dr. John Hill, who, inspired by Fielding's success, was already using his facile pen in the department of prose fiction.

⁵⁷ *The History of Charlotte Summers, the Fortunate Parish Girl*, London, n.d. [1750], I, 3, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Book II, ch. i, p. 220.

⁵⁹ Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XX, 192 (April, 1750).

Knowing that a reference to the popular *Tom Jones* was sure to catch the eye of the public, Hill (before the famous quarrel) took occasion to be very complimentary to Fielding. "It does not appear," he declares in his "Introduction" to *Mr. Loveill*, that "every writer" of novels "can be the father of a foundling."⁶⁰

By claiming a literary kinship with *Tom Jones* the unknown author of *Charlotte Summers* had attracted considerable attention. Some persons, who should have known better, even fathered the production on Fielding (Grimm,⁶¹ for instance), and allusions to the book were very common. Here was another chance for Hill. Still friendly toward Fielding, he declared, in his pamphlet entitled *A Parallel between Lady Frail and Peregrine Pickle*,⁶² that there was no more "Likeness" between *Charlotte Summers* and *Joseph Andrews* than between the lesser figures of the English stage and the incomparable Garrick. "Mr. Fielding," he wrote, is "one of the greatest Geniuses in his Way, that this, or perhaps any Age or Nation have produced," who "was happy enough, some Years ago, to strike out a new Road of Entertainment in the Relation of Occurrences, like those of real Life; introduced by the Means of Characters full of Singularity, but not out of Nature. Every Man's Heart told him the Descriptions were just, while he was reading them, and every Incident had its peculiar Moral or Instruction couch'd under it, inspiring to something laudable, or cautioning against some Foible, which all characters of a like Turn must have a Propensity for." More than once in his periodical entitled *The Inspector*, Hill at this time paid court to Fielding, calling attention to the "novelty"⁶³ of *Tom Jones*, referring to some happy⁶⁴ passage, or characteriz-

⁶⁰ *The Adventures of Mr. Loveill*, London, 1750, pp. iii, v, 3.

⁶¹ *Correspondance Littéraire par Grimm*, Paris, 1877, II, 267.

⁶² *A Parallel between . . . the Lady Frail, and the Lady of Quality in Peregrine Pickle*, London, 1751. See pp. 3, 4, 6. Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1751.

⁶³ *The Inspector*, as reprinted, London, 1753, II (No. 94), 74.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I (No. 27), 114.

ing the author's works as "inestimable."⁶⁵ Again, in another novel, *The Adventures of George Edwards* (1751), he makes use of Fielding's idea that a prose fiction should be a *prose-epic*, and—hoping to please Fielding's rival as well—declares (with his usual effrontery) that all the characters of his *Creole* are as guiltless of slander upon actual people as if they were *Tom Jones's* and *Clarissa's*.⁶⁶

So, in one way or another, would-be novel-writers turned to account the popularity of Henry Fielding. Not only his prose works but, occasionally, his poetry as well was called upon to attract the attention of the public. William Chaigneau's *The History of Jack Connor* (1752), for example, which according to Mrs. Delany was "a bad imitation of Tom Jones and Gil Blas,"⁶⁷ introduced some verses of Fielding's on the subject of "Good Nature," as a posy at the beginning of a chapter.

Head and shoulders above any of the imitations of which we have spoken, however, was the celebrated *Pompey the Little* (1751), whose fame was still sufficient at the beginning of the nineteenth century to secure for it a place in Mrs. Barbauld's *British Novelists*. This anonymous production, which has been called by Mr. Gosse "sprightly and graceful from the first page to the last,"⁶⁸ and which owes much to Fielding, has long been accepted (on the authority of a letter of Gray's to Horace Walpole) as the work of Francis Coventry. Even in the first edition, among some "Observations on Modern Novels,"⁶⁹ the author acknowledges Pompey's pedigree, when

⁶⁵ *The Inspector*, March 15, 1751.

⁶⁶ *The Adventures of Mr George Edwards, a Creole*, second ed., London, 1751, pp. vii, 10.

⁶⁷ *The Autobiography . . . of . . . Mrs. Delany*, London, 1861, III, 116 (letter postmarked April 30, 1752). *Jack Connor* was listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March, 1752. For the poem, see Henley's edition, XII, 258-261.

⁶⁸ Gosse, E., *Gossip in a Library*, New York, 1891, p. 208.

⁶⁹ Book I, ch. i, p. 8 of *The History of Pompey the Little: or, the Life and Adventures of a Lap-Dog*, London, 1751. Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1751.

he says that in form his novel is what "one of my Cotemporaries calls 'an *Epic Poem in Prose*;' " and in the initial chapter of Book II he refers to Fielding as that "great Master of human Nature, the ingenius Author of *Tom Jones*, who justly styles himself King of *Biographers*." For the third edition (1752), still anonymous, Coventry wrote "a word or two in behalf of novel-writing" and used them as a friendly "Dedication" of this edition "To *Henry Fielding, Esq*;" who, in his opinion, stands "unquestionably . . . foremost in this species of composition." Stoutly defending those examples of the novelist's art which are works of merit, the author exclaims against the "ridiculous and affected disdain" with which many people regard "such idle compositions as lives and romances." Among the scoffers are the "learned men," who "fastidiously decry all books that are on a level with common understandings, as empty, trifling and impertinent," while they contentedly prepare commentaries on the "worst ribaldry of *Aristophanes*" and turn up their noses at "*Gulliver* or *Joseph Andrews*." Then there are the "triflers"; i.e., the "beaux, rakes, petit-maitres and fine ladies, whose lives are spent in doing the things which novels record," concerning whom *Pompey's* author declares: "I once heard a very fine lady, condemning some highly finished conversations in one of your [Fielding's] works, sir, for this curious reason—'because,' said she, 'tis such sort of stuff as passes every day between me and my maid.' "

In fine, Coventry regards Fielding's novels as "master-pieces and complete models in their kind," worthy "the attention of the greatest and wisest men;" and declares that "if anybody is ashamed of reading them, or can read them without entertainment and instruction," he heartily pities "their understandings." Concerning Warburton's "very ingenious note"⁷⁰—of which more will be said presently—to the effect that the novel "is now brought to maturity by Mr. *De Marivaux* in France, and Mr. *Fielding* in England," he can make

⁷⁰ A footnote in Warburton's *Works of Pope*, London, 1751, IV, 169.

"but one objection," which is, "that the name of Mr. *De Marivaux* stands foremost of the two." Marivaux's characters, to his mind, "are neither so original, so ludicrous, so well distinguished, nor so happily contrasted" as Fielding's; and, "as the characters of a novel principally determine its merit," he, Coventry, "must be allowed to esteem" his "countryman the greater author." "Few books," he says in conclusion, "have been written with a spirit equal to *Joseph Andrews*, and no story that I know of, was ever invented with more happiness, or conducted with more art and management than that of *Tom Jones*."

It is unfortunate that this enlightened assessment of Fielding's genius, owing to the nature and anonymity of the vehicle by which it was conveyed to the public, was almost entirely lacking in authority. According to Mr. Gosse, the discovery of its authorship "made Coventry a nine-days hero,"⁷¹ and no doubt this was true among the writer's friends; but the world in general seems to have known little of the matter, for the book was commonly regarded as anonymous far down the century. Among the fiction-manufacturers, however, "little Pompey's" remarks on Fielding were eagerly read and noted. In *The Adventures of Captain Greenland* (1752), the title of which has survived on account of certain illustrations by the youthful Thackeray, we find, for example, the following passage: "The ingenious Author of a *great Work*, call'd *Pompey the Little*, hath been pleased to style that worthy and learned Gentleman above mention'd the *King of Biographers*. For which good Deed, I will also, confer upon him, the Title of *Archbishop of Romance*; for, being the first Person, who, by divine Providence, hath happily placed this *Imperial Crown* upon his *Majesty's* [Fielding's] Head." Of no value in itself, *Captain Greenland* is one of the many conscious imitations of Fielding's novels, though the features imitated are, as usual, merely such external ones as the prolegomenous chapter (e.g., II, iv, ch. i, "Imitation of a modern Preface;" III, vii, ch. i,

⁷¹ Gosse, E., *Gossip in a Library*, p. 204.

"Prefatory Despondings"); the digression (*e.g.*, III, 300); and the passage of mock-heroics (*passim*). Again, inasmuch as "in most modern Histories of this cast, those Heroes who have sprung from the meanest . . . Parentage, have been the best received by the Public; as Madam *Pamela*, Mr. *David Simple*, Mr. *Joseph Andrews*, Mr. *Roderick Random*, [and] *Thomas Jones, Esq.*;" the author of *Captain Greenland* has made his principal character a "Farmer's Son" (I, 6-7).⁷²

Before the end of the year 1751 so much attention had been directed to Fielding's excellences by the unsuccessful efforts of his imitators (particularly by the author of *Charlotte Summers*) that someone was impelled to compose an *Essay on the New Species of Writing founded by Mr. Fielding*. After speaking of the "many Histories of this kind that lately have been publish'd, which undoubtedly owe their Rise to the extraordinary Success of Mr. *Fielding's* Pieces," the writer of the *Essay* singles out *Charlotte Summers* for special attention (because the author of this novel "goes so far as to call himself" Fielding's "poetical Issue"), and characterizes it as a "servile" and unsuccessful imitation, which, with other "weak, sickly" productions like *Joe Thompson* and *Peregrine Pickle* deserves to be destroyed "in Embrio." Whatever strictures he may make, he promises to perform his task in a "more Gentleman-like Manner than our Author has yet been us'd by any of his Critics," particularly by "the Examiner of *Tom Jones*, and the Author of *Bampfylde Moore Carew*."⁷³

The author—no blackguard this time, no ruffianly Orbilius or Beggar King—was as good as his word and wrote in the manner of a gentleman. Furthermore, he actually saw the situation: he realized that in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*,

⁷² *The Adventures of Capt. Greenland*, London, 1752, III, 299; IV, 142-143. Listed in *Monthly Review*, VI, 311 (April, 1752). This novel has been attributed to W. Goodall. For Thackeray's illustrations, see *Thackerayana*, London, 1898, new edition, pp. 78-81.

⁷³ *An Essay on the New Species of Writing founded by Mr. FIELDING*, London, 1751. Listed in *The London Magazine*, March, 1751, p. 144. Possibly written by Coventry; see Cross's *Fielding*, III, 346.

A N
E S S A Y
O N T H E
N E W S P E C I E S o f W R I T I N G
F O U N D E D B Y
M r . F I E L D I N G :
W i t h a W o r d o r T w o u p o n t h e
M O D E R N S T A T E o f C R I T I C I S M .

*Qui, quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
Pleniùs ac meliùs Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.
Cur ita crediderim, nisi quid te detinet, audi.*

H O R .



L O N D O N :
P r i n t e d f o r W . O W E N , n e a r T e m p l e - B a r .
M D C C L I .

Fielding had indeed founded a "New Species of Writing" which should show life as it is; and that as yet even the most successful of his followers belonged to a lower order. According to a slighting reference by Mr. Urban, the *Essay* consists of "some trite remarks on novel-writing," and is "in general an encomium on Mr. *Fielding*" and his works.⁷⁴ Uninspired the little pamphlet certainly is, and its performance fell below its promise; but in 1751 its matter was far from "trite," epitomizing as it did the "Laws" which Fielding, the innovator, had laid down for those who should follow him in "this new kind of Biography." Of these laws the "first and grand" one is, that "thro' the whole, Humour must diffuse itself"; otherwise, "however regular" the design may be, "the whole Performance must be dead and languid." Next to be considered is the "Choice of Characters," whose every word must be "entirely consonant to the Notion the Author would have his Reader to entertain of them"; who "must be exactly copied from Nature"; and who should be "as agreeably varied as Parson Adams and Madam Slipslop." As to the matter of form, Fielding has "ordain'd, that these Histories should be divided into Books, and these subdivided into Chapters; and also that the first Chapter of every Book" should "consist of any Thing the Author chose to entertain his Readers with." The plot or "Story" should be "probable," and the "Characters" should be taken from "common Life"; while "the Style should be easy and familiar, but at the same Time sprightly and entertaining . . . sometimes heightened to the Mock-heroic, to ridicule the Bombast, which obtain'd so much in the Romances." No "Writer has so strictly kept up to" the holding of suspense as has the creator of *Tom Jones*, the choice of "admirable Titles to Chapters" conducing especially to this excellence. Finally, the aim of a novelist should be to paint an exact "Picture" of "Life," to lay bare, as Fielding has done, "all the little movements by which Human Nature is actuated."

⁷⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXI, 143 (March, 1751).

Considering next the "few Mistakes" of which Fielding has been guilty, the writer first takes up *Joseph Andrews* and, on account of the dialogues between Joseph and his temptress, finds it impossible to give the book a clean bill on the "score" of "Delicacy." "Lewdness," he says, "is too mean a Branch of Humour" for "a Man of Mr. *Fielding's* Sense." A second objection is, that "tho' the Narration is conducted with great Spirit, and there are innumerable Strokes of Wit and Nature throughout," the "Story on which it is founded is not sufficiently interesting"; and that while the "Characters" are "equally natural and interesting with those of *Tom Jones*," the "Parts they are allotted engage much less of our Attention." The critic then turns his attention to *Tom Jones*, a "Performance which on the whole perhaps is the most lively Book ever publish'd," and rejects the "*Man of the Hill*" as a "Narration which neither interests or entertains the Reader, and is of no service" to the plot. But whatever "other few Blemishes" there are in these two novels may be compared to "Freckles," which are the "more remarkable in those of Fair Complexions."

Despite all strictures, the main drift of the *Essay* is to the effect that Fielding has discovered a new continent on the globe of fiction—the land of Realism—and that this discovery is a supreme achievement. Nothing came of the little pamphlet, so far as we know, for it was quite lacking in authority and was not distinguished in style; nevertheless, it is an interesting document, not only because it records the impress which Fielding made upon the novelists who immediately followed him and traded upon his fame, but because it calls attention to the difference in stature between even the most prominent of those adventurers and the Great Explorer himself—"The English Cervantes"—the principles of whose art it sincerely endeavors to expound.

IV

The story of the vogue of *Tom Jones*, which we have been following in periodicals and pamphlets and in the minor fiction

of the day, may also be read in another series of documents—the correspondence of Fielding's celebrated rival and active though covert enemy, Samuel Richardson. There can be no doubt that the author of *Pamela* had from the first been wounded *sans remède* by the parody on his book in *Joseph Andrews*; yet, if we may judge from his letters, it was not until *Tom Jones* became alarmingly popular that he expatiated upon the matter to his friends. That Fielding had been at work on the novel, Richardson well knew; Fielding's sister Sarah, who had become one of his fondest admirers—his “daughters” as he called them—was a constant visitor at North End; so, too, was Jane Collier, who collaborated with Sarah in *The Cry*. By these two “daughters” Richardson was doubtless kept in touch with Fielding's progress.⁷⁵ Just before *Tom Jones* appeared, Richardson wrote Edward Young (and also Aaron Hill) that Mr. Lyttelton, Mr. Fielding, and others had recommended a happy ending for *Clarissa*. He did not follow their advice; but the tone of the references implies that at the time of these letters Richardson, instead of being violently opposed to Fielding, was somewhat flattered by his rival's interest. In the summer of 1749, however, when *Tom Jones* became so much talked of, he commenced to mobilize his forces against this wicked intruder.

One of his first acts as a commander was to put down a gentle but determined mutiny. “Dear Sir,” runs his letter to Aaron Hill (July 12, 1749), “have you read *Tom Jones*? . . . I have found neither Leisure nor Inclination, yet, to read that Piece, and the less inclination as several good judges of my acquaintance condemn it and the general taste together. I could wish to know the Sentiments of your ladies upon it. If favourable they would induce me to open the six volumes.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See Margaret Collier's letter to Richardson written before the publication of *Tom Jones*, in which, apropos of the method which Mrs. Teachum (a character in Sarah Fielding's *Governess*) employed in punishing her scholars, there is a reference to the “Thwackums.”—Richardson's *Correspondence*, II, 63 (October 4, 1748).

⁷⁶ Brewster, D., *Aaron Hill*, New York, 1913, p. 270.

"They will certainly have sauciness enough to do it," replied Hill, "being of late grown borrowing Customers to an Itinerary Bookseller's Shop, that rumbles, once a week, thro' Plaistow in a wheelbarrow, with Chaff enough, of Conscience! and sometimes a weightier Grain."⁷⁷ The "ladies" in question were Hill's young daughters, Astraea and Minerva, who had visited Richardson in 1741 and who had waxed almost as enthusiastic as their father over the author of *Pamela*. If an adverse opinion of *Tom Jones* could be secured from anyone, surely it would be from the daughters of the devoted Aaron Hill! A week later came their answer—which Richardson perused with genuine amazement. They had read, they declared, "the whole six volumes; and found much (masqu'd) merit, in 'em all; a double merit, both of Head, and *Heart*." They think the author wears his "Lightness, as a grave Head sometimes wears a *Feather*: which tho' He and Fashion may consider as an ornament, Reflection will condemn, as a Disguise, and *covering*." They then proceed to console Richardson by exposing the folly of making light of grave matters, and continue their examination. They take an "honest pleasure" in commending the plot of *Tom Jones*: "All the changefull windings of the Author's Fancy carry on a course of regular Design; and end in an extremely moving Close, where Lines [Lives?] that seem'd to wander and run different ways, meet, All, in an instructive Centre." In fact, the "whole Piece consists of an inventive Race of Disappointments and Recoveries." They commend the underlying moral of the book: "Its *Events* reward Sincerity, and punish and expose Hypocrisy; shew Pity and Benevolence in amiable Lights, and Avarice and Brutality in very despicable ones. In every Part it has Humanity for its Intention." They admit that there are in the novel "bold shocking Pictures; and (I fear) [says the fair Astraea] not unresembling ones, in high Life, and in low. And (to conclude this too adventurous Guess-work, from a Pair of forward Baggages) [*Tom Jones*] woud, every where, (we think),

⁷⁷ Brewster, D., *Aaron Hill*, p. 270 (letter of July 20, 1749); and Dobson's *Fielding*, New York, 1883, pp. 130-131.

deserve to please,—if stript of what the Author thought himself most sure to *please by*. And thus, Sir, we have told you our sincere opinion of *Tom Jones*. . . . Your most profest Admirers and most humble Servants, ASTRAEA and MINERVA HILL.”⁷⁸

Surely this was more than Richardson had bargained for; such heretical opinions from this “pair of forward Baggages” would never do. The week was hardly over before he sent them a pious lecture on their presumption. Of this reply Austin Dobson says:⁷⁹ “His requesting two young women to read and criticise a book which he has heard strongly condemned as immoral—his own obvious familiarity with what he has not read but does not scruple to censure—his transparently jealous anticipation of its author’s ability—all this forms a picture . . . characteristic alike of the man and the time.” Richardson’s letter, which Dobson so admirably describes, is as follows:

“I must confess, that I have been prejudiced by the Opinion of Several judicious Friends against the truly coarse-titled *Tom Jones*; and so have been discouraged from reading it.—I was told, that it was a rambling Collection of Waking Dreams, in which Probability was not observed: And that it had a very bad Tendency. And I had Reason to think that the Author intended for his Second View (His *first*, to fill his Pocket, by accommodating it to the reigning Taste) in writing it, to whiten a vicious Character, and to make Morality bend to his Practices. What Reason had he to make his *Tom* illegitimate, in an Age where Keeping is become a Fashion? Why did he make him a common—What shall I call it? And a Kept Fellow, the Lowest of all Fellows, yet in Love with a Young Creature who was trapping [trapesing] after him, a Fugitive from her Father’s House?—Why did he draw his Heroine so fond, so foolish, and so insipid?—Indeed he has one Excuse—He knows not how to draw a delicate Woman—He has not been accustomed to such Company,—And is too prescribing,

⁷⁸ Brewster, D., *Aaron Hill*, pp. 270-271; and Dobson’s *Fielding*, New York, 1883, p. 131.

⁷⁹ Dobson’s *Fielding*, p. 132.

too impetuous, too immoral, I will venture to say, to take any other Byass than that a perverse and crooked Nature has given him; or Evil Habits, at least, have confirm'd in him. Do Men expect Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles? But, perhaps, I think the worse of the Piece because I know the Writer, and dislike his Principles both Public and Private, tho' I wish well to the *Man*, and Love Four worthy Sisters of his, with whom I am well acquainted. And indeed should admire him, did he make the Use of his Talents which I wish him to make, For the Vein of Humour, and Ridicule, which he is Master of, might, if properly turned, do great Service to y^e Cause of Virtue. But no more of the Gentleman's Work, after I have said, That the favourable Things, you say of the Piece, will tempt me, if I can find Leisure, to give it a Perusal."⁸⁰ Comment on this letter would be superfluous!

Only a year before the epistle was written, Fielding had cordially welcomed the first two volumes of *Glariſſa* in his⁸¹ *Jacobite's Journal*, and later, in his *Covent-Garden Journal*, he again⁸² referred pleasantly to the author. The reason that Richardson attacked Fielding was not that his rival's comportment was really unbearable to him; for, in the first place, there is nothing to show that in 1749 the private life of Fielding was questionable, and surely his public life as an efficient magistrate deserved the highest praise. Even if the author were leading a vicious existence, he could hardly have outdone Old Cibber, who—because of his flattery—Richardson warmly extolled. It was not Fielding's morality but his popularity which outraged his rival's delicate sensibilities.

A week later (August 11, 1749) Aaron Hill himself (who, in the old days, had been friendly to Fielding the dramatist) replied in his characteristic manner, describing to him how

⁸⁰ Quoted in Dobson's *Fielding*, pp. 132-133 (London ed., pp. 139-140).

⁸¹ *The Jacobite's Journal*, No. V. Quoted in Dobson's *Fielding*, p. 107.

⁸² *Covent-Garden Journal*, No. 10 (February 4, 1752). Jensen's edition, I, 193.

Astraea and Minerva had taken the scolding. "Unfortunate *Tom Jones*!" he exclaims, "how sadly has he mortify'd Two sawcy Correspondents of your making! They are with me now: and bid me tell you, You have spoil'd 'em Both, for Criticks." And after observing that his fair daughters "*cry'd*" for being thought to have praised a book that had an "*Evil Tendency*, in any Part or Purpose of it," Hill *père* says they hold fast to their first opinion and desire Richardson not to believe the "over-rigid Judgment of those Friends, who cou'd not find a Thread of Moral Meaning in *Tom Jones*," until he has time to read the book himself; "'tis there, pert Sluts, they will be bold enough to rest the Matter,—Mean while, they love and honour you and your opinions."⁸³

With rebellion in his camp of fair ones, Richardson thought it time to strike a crushing blow; in his reply, he expresses sorrow for giving pain to the "dear Ladies," and (to quote Austin Dobson)⁸⁴ minutely justifies "his foregone conclusions from the expressions they had used. He refers to Fielding again as 'a very indelicate, a very impetuous, an unyielding-spirited Man'; and he also trusts to be able to 'bestow a Reading' on *Tom Jones*; but by a letter from Lady Bradshaigh . . . dated December, 1749, it seems that even at that date he had not, or pretended he had not, yet done so."

Richardson had barely silenced Astraea and Minerva when he received a letter (long since famous) from his great admirer, Lady Bradshaigh, which confirmed all his worst fears. That the young people in her ladyship's circle were applying the names "*Tom Jones*" and "*Sophia*" to their favorites, and even, in one instance, to a pet dog,⁸⁵ was indisputable evidence—it put rancors in the vessel of Richardson's peace. "So long as the world will receive," he answered,⁸⁶ "Mr. Fielding will write. Have you ever seen a list of his performances? Nothing but a shorter life than I wish him, can hinder him from writ-

⁸³ Dobson's *Fielding*, New York, 1883, p. 133 (London ed., p. 140).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133 (London ed., p. 141).

⁸⁵ See p. 40.

⁸⁶ *The Correspondence*, IV, 285-286.

ing himself out of date." Then plumps the cat out of the bag: "The Pamela, which he abused in his Shamela," declares Richardson, "taught him how to write to please, tho' his manners are so different. Before his Joseph Andrews (hints and names taken from that story, with a lewd and ungenerous engraftment) the poor man wrote without being read. . . . But to have done, for the present, with this fashionable author." There are other comments in the same vein; but they must give place to the following answer.

In this letter (December 16, 1749) Lady Bradshaigh tries to make amends. She obligingly assures Richardson, in practically his own words, that the "character of Sophia is so very trifling and insipid"⁸⁷ that she has "never heard a dispute about it"; and though the "girls are certainly fond of Tom Jones," and "do not scruple declaring it" she never lets a "faulty word or action pass . . . without a visible disapprobation." Indeed, she has had "many a round battle" with them "concerning Tom Jones"; and despite the fact that Richardson seems to think her blame "soft" and "gentle," she really designed the "condemnation [of *Tom Jones*] strongly" from her "heart." Before completing her lengthy epistle she again speaks of the novel; her conscience still troubles her, and she begs "pardon" for ever having mentioned the book. "I do assure you, Sir, Mr. Fielding's private character [learned from Richardson himself] makes him to me appear disagreeable." But in spite of her asserted disapproval not only of *Tom Jones* but of its author, Lady Bradshaigh persists in thinking "there are many good things" in Fielding's novel. Less impetuous than Astraea and Minerva Hill, the "beloved incognita," notwithstanding her deference, was subdued but not convinced. Richardson probably surmised as much; for his reply was mostly made up of an account of his unavailing attempts to see her in the park, where he dined as he walked "on a sea-biscuit," which he had put in his pocket, his "family at home, all the time," and wholly unsuspecting. Of the author of *Tom Jones*, he merely says (if the passage may be cited again), "As to the list of

⁸⁷ *The Correspondence*, IV, 295, 296, 309, 310.

Fielding's performances, I have seen at least twenty of them; for none of which, before Joseph Andrews (except for such as were of a party turn), he gained either credit or readers."⁸⁸

Then, one day in the spring, running across the allusion in *Charlotte Summers* which we gave a moment ago, Richardson, ignoring the greater praise of Fielding, appropriated—in his letter to Lady Bradshaigh—all the glory to himself. But her ladyship was not so easily taken in. "When I saw you last," she wrote (March 27, 1750), "I forgot to tell you I had read *Charlotte Summers*; but did not find any thing relating to you, like what you told me. I doubt I do not well remember what he [the author of the novel] says; but I think it is, that we are taught the art of *laughing* and *crying*, from your *melancholy* disposition, and Mr. Fielding's *gay* one; and I think passes a compliment upon each, though perhaps he might design to sneer." Then, lest she had gone too far, her ladyship hastened to say: "There are very different kinds of laughter: you make me laugh with pleasure; but I often laugh, and am angry at the same time with the facetious Mr. Fielding."⁸⁹ Lady Bradshaigh was not the only one who was angry with herself for laughing. Since the formal world of that day thought it more dignified to weep, Fielding was too often taken at his word and considered a mere humorist. You may make me laugh, said the pompous Mid-Eighteenth Century, but I shall have my revenge: I will call you a buffoon. To return to Richardson, whatever chagrin Lady Bradshaigh's rebuff may have caused him it did not prevent his preserving her letter; the day was sure to come, he believed, when, the correspondence being given to the world, time would bring in his revenges.

Far more satisfactory than Lady Bradshaigh's letter was a communication received during the previous summer (July 10, 1749), from Solomon Lowe (the author of a *Critical Spelling Book*), who was a great admirer of *Clarissa*. "I find by Cave's Magazine," he wrote, that the "fame of it [*i.e.*, *Clarissa*] is

⁸⁸ *Correspondence*, IV, 312 (January 9, 1749-1750).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, 7-8.

got into Holland, and I do not doubt but all Europe will ring of it: when a Cracker, that was some thous^d hours a-composing, will no longer be heard, or talkt of."⁹⁰ Richardson's procedure was characteristic; before filing the document away with a view to its inclusion in his published correspondence, he wrote on the back of the manuscript: "Cracker, T. Jones."

As the months went by, Richardson and his friends, dismayed to find that Fielding's novel was no ephemeral fire-cracker, were busy with complaints and denials, though in spite of themselves they sometimes admitted that the book possessed certain excellences. "The more I read Tom Jones, the more I detest him," and "admire" "Clarissa," wrote Catherine Talbot (May 22, 1749), "Yet there are in it things that must touch and please every good heart, and probe to the quick many a bad one, and humour that it is impossible not to laugh at."⁹¹ A year later the situation, from Richardson's point of view, had grown worse rather than better. In the autumn of 1750 (September 25), sympathetic Mrs. Donnellan took pains to assure the printer that "those who are fit to write delicately," are, like him delicate in body. "Tom Jones could get drunk, and do all sorts of bad things, in the height of his joy for his uncle's recovery." "I dare say," she adds, "Fielding is a robust, strong man."⁹² Consolation also came from another—and lower—quarter; in other words, from that strange literary adventuress whom Richardson befriended, Laetitia Pilkington. In an ebullient "Proem" (see her *Memoirs*) she issued the following manifesto:

Stand apart now, ye *Roderick Randoms*,
Foundlings, bastard Sons of Wit,
 Hence, ye *Profane*, be far away,
 All ye that bow to *Idol Lusts*, and *Altars* raise,
 Or to false *Heroes* give fantastick Praise.

⁹⁰ Forster Collection, Vol. XV: see Dobson's *Fielding*, New York, p. 134; and Cross's *Fielding*, II, 150.

⁹¹ *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, I, 312.

⁹² Richardson's *Correspondence*, IV, 30 (September 25, 1750).

Yet in the course of her curious hotchpotch she has a pleasant word for her benefactor's rival. Swift told her, she says, that he had never "laugh'd above twice in his Life; once at some Trick a Mountebank's Merry-Andrew play'd; the other time . . . at the Circumstance of *Tom Thumb's* killing the Ghost."⁹³ Swift died three years after the publication of *Joseph Andrews*; since by 1742 (as has been pointed out) he was hopelessly insane, we need not wonder, as some biographers have done, that the great Ironist underestimated Fielding. Of the novelist's wit—Swift was thinking of the author of *Tom Thumb*—the fair Laetitia "can assure Mr. *Fielding*, the Dean had a high Opinion . . . which must be a Pleasure to him, as no Man was ever better qualified to judge, possessing it so eminently himself." The necessitous Mrs. Pilkington, indebted to Richardson as she was, could not in spite of her slap at Fielding in her "Proem" quite afford to let the matter rest there.

Another counterblast, from very high authority indeed, was issued in the spring of 1750 by Richardson's friend, Samuel Johnson, who, not yet the arbiter of polite learning, was increasing his fame by the publication of *The Rambler*. From the presence in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of obscure but repeated testimony to the popularity of *Tom Jones* it may be inferred that, influential as he was, Johnson was unable to give complete expression to his opinions in that magazine. *The Rambler*, on the other hand, was his own. Considering the vogue of *Tom Jones* we are not surprised to find the number for March 31, 1750, devoted to the dangers arising from the "familiar histories" at that time so popular. Especially did he inveigh against those wicked heroes who are given so many good qualities that "we lose the abhorrence of their faults." There seems to be no good reason for rejecting Chalmers's statement that this *Rambler* was "occasioned by the popularity

⁹³ Laetitia Pilkington's *Memoirs*, London, 1754, III, 13, 155-156. It was, of course, the ghost of Tom Thumb that was killed—by Lord Grizzle.

of Roderick Random, and Tom Jones."⁹⁴ What Johnson declared in his *Rambler* the following spring concerning *Clarissa* has been one of the most famous *dicta* in literary history—but of that we shall have something to say later on.

V

In spite of all defamers in high station or in low, there can be no question about the enthusiasm with which *Tom Jones* was received by the public—the evidence which has been gathered in the course of this chapter should be sufficient to establish this point; even those who were antagonistic to the novelist were compelled to admit the vogue of the novel. But it is equally true—and this is a surprising literary fact which needs to be emphasized—that Fielding had not yet succeeded in winning the plaudits of what was then considered the "polite world." When we call the roll of persons of quality and of those distinguished in literature, we find astonishingly little in the way of unqualified enthusiasm. This matter will be taken up more fully when a summary is made of the attitude of Fielding's contemporaries toward his work as a whole; but certain details are in order here.

Lady Hertford, as we have said, predicted—after reading the earlier volumes—that *Tom Jones* would be better than *Joseph Andrews*; but her friend Lady Luxborough (Bolingbroke's sister), with whom she corresponded, was less favorably impressed. Accordingly she wrote to Shenstone, March 23, 1749, before *she* had finished the book: "I might live at least five hundred years in this place [that is, Barrells] before one quarter of the incidents happened which are related in any one of the six volumes of *Tom Jones*. I have not read the two last; but I think as you do, that no one character yet is near so striking as Adams's in the author's other composition, and the plan seems far-fetched; but in the adventures that happen, I think he produces personages but too like those one meets with in the world; and even among those people to whom he gives

⁹⁴ *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, London, 1816, IV, 24.

good characters, he shews them as in a concave glass, which discovers blemishes that would not have appeared to the common eye. . . . If Mr. Fielding and Mr. Hogarth could abate the vanity of the world by shewing its faults so plainly, they would do more than the greatest divines have yet been capable of: But human nature will still be the same, and would, I am afraid, furnish them, if they lived till the world ended, with such imperfect objects to represent."⁹⁵ In the *Letters to Shenstone*, from which the passage above is taken, there are several other references to Fielding. On September 5, 1750 (Letter LIII), she refers to "Parson Adams's way of travelling on foot"; on April 16, 1750-51 (Letter LXIV), she tells the poet that his "apology for keeping *Tom Jones* is needless"; on "Ascension-Day," 1751 (Letter LXIX), she declares *Pompey the Little* is Fielding's; and in a previous letter (LXVII), May 27, 1751, she speaks of "Pompey" as "entertaining enough for such a trifle," for "Fielding, you know, cannot write without humour." Still it is obvious that her ladyship was never very enthusiastic about the novelist; and her assessment of *Tom Jones* may be taken as fairly typical of the attitude of the "polite world." To accustom its taste to such a realistic presentation of life as Fielding's, was, no doubt, somewhat difficult; Richardson's idealistic treatment gave ordinarily less trouble.

In one noble household, to be sure, *Tom Jones* received a readier welcome than *Clarissa*. The following story, which biographers of Richardson seem to have missed but which is too good to pass over, is to be found in the family letters of Fielding's patron, the Duke of Richmond, who discovered in *Clarissa* a source of diversion. Fond of a jest and wishing to amuse his sprightly young daughter, Lady Kildare, then in Ireland, who was just recovering from an illness, he took advantage of Richardson's imperfect knowledge of polite society and endeavored to make him the butt of a practical joke. He

⁹⁵ Lady Luxborough's *Letters . . . to . . . Shenstone*, pp. 88-89 (Letter XXVI, March 23, "1748-49").

assumed the character of John Cheale, Norroy King at Arms, with whom he was very friendly, and administered the following reproof (February 9, 1747-48):

MR. RICHARDSON,

As a great admirer of, y^r last performance the History of Miss Clarissa Harlowe, I take y^e liberty of troubling you wth a short criticism, which, considering my employment, I think I have a right to lay before you, in Page 176 of y^e first Volume is this egregious blunder in Heraldry . . . how can you . . . know so little of the English Peerage as to call this old Viscount's daughter *Lady Charlotte Harlowe*, a Viscount's daughter is only Miss before marriage and then only Mrs. Harlowe, w^{ch} I wonder your brother Booksellers of the genteel side of Temple Bar did not inform you of. . . . There are other absurdities in y^r book but depend upon it that by this I have mentioned you have highly affronted all y^e Dukes Marquises and Earls Daughters, in England Scotland, and Ireland.⁹⁶

To this letter the Duke appended the signature: "Jo Cheale Norroy King at Arms." Needless to say, the Duke's young daughter, Lady Kildare, awaited the outcome of this hoax with great eagerness. There was no doubt in her mind that the "Author of that most stupid Book 'Clarissa'" would reply, and she was "vastly impatient to hear of Cheale's surprise"⁹⁷ as well as of Richardson's. It was a jubilant moment when she could write her father that "in the 3rd 4th 5th 6th and 7th Volumes" Lady Charlotte Harlowe had become plain "*Mrs. Harlowe*."⁹⁸ Meanwhile, young Lady Kildare and the elder Lady Kildare, her husband's mother, had been reading *Tom Jones* together with great enjoyment. In a letter to her mother, the Duchess of Richmond, June 26, 1749, she says: "Lady Kildare reads mighty well. Have you finished *Tom Jones*? She likes it vastly."⁹⁹ No doubt Fielding's book was as well received by the Duke and Duchess of Richmond at home.

⁹⁶ *A Duke and His Friends. The Life and Letters of the Second Duke of Richmond*, by the Earl of March, London, 1911, II, 637.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 638.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 666.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 665.

The hoax which the Duke of Richmond perpetrated on the unsuspecting Richardson would have been enjoyed, had she known about it, by Fielding's titled cousin, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Though she was "such an old fool as to weep over Clarissa Harlowe, like any milkmaid of sixteen over the ballad of the Lady's Fall," she pronounced the novel "on the whole" "most miserable stuff," likely to "do more general mischief than the works of Lord Rochester." "Even that model of affection, Clarissa," she writes, "is so faulty in her behaviour as to deserve little compassion."¹⁰⁰ Much more to her taste were the works of Fielding. Here, in greater detail, is the letter previously quoted, which she sent from Lovere, Italy, October 1, N. S. [1749], to her daughter, the Countess of Bute, on the arrival of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*: "I have at length received the box, with the books enclosed, for which I give you many thanks, as they amused me very much. I gave a very ridiculous proof of it, fitter indeed for my granddaughter than myself. I returned from a party on horseback; and after having rode twenty miles, part of it by moonshine, it was ten at night when I found the box arrived. I could not deny myself the pleasure of opening it; and, falling upon Fielding's works, was fool enough to sit up all night reading. I think *Joseph Andrews* better than his *Foundling*."¹⁰¹ As time went on, Lady Mary had other things to say—not all of them complimentary—concerning her cousin and his books; and notwithstanding the "*Ne plus ultra*" of which Lady Stuart tells us, her first impression was that *Tom Jones* was inferior to *Joseph Andrews*. Still, the passage given above contains more genuine enthusiasm for Fielding's novels than was commonly recorded at that time by those who may be regarded as competent in literature.

Strange as it seems, perhaps the most vigorous defense of *Tom Jones* (made during this period by a critic of ability) which has found its way into the annals of literature, was

¹⁰⁰ *The Letters . . . of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, edited by W. M. Thomas, London, n.d. [1861], II, 222.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, II, 185-186.

written, four months after the appearance of the novel, by that professed Richardsonian—the “learned” Miss Carter. It was, in fact, an answer to the attack on Fielding’s hero (just now quoted) made by her friend Miss Talbot. “I am sorry to find you so outrageous about poor Tom Jones,” runs her letter of June 20, 1749, “he is no doubt an imperfect, but not a detestable character, with all that honesty, good-nature, and generosity of temper. Though nobody can admire Clarissa more than I do; yet with all our partiality, I am afraid, it must be confessed, that Fielding’s book is the most natural representation of what passes in the world, and of the bizarreries which arise from the mixture of good and bad, which makes up the composition of most folks. Richardson has no doubt a very good hand at painting excellence, but there is a strange awkwardness and extravagance in his vicious characters. To be sure, poor man, he had read in a book, or heard some one say, there was such a thing in the world as wickedness, but being totally ignorant in what manner the said wickedness operates upon the human heart . . . he has drawn such a monster [Lovelace], as I hope never existed in mortal shape, for . . . the honour of human nature.”¹⁰² Thus, for the second time, Miss Carter stoutly defended Fielding’s realism; but for all that, despite her criticism of Lovelace, she admitted her “partiality” for Richardson, whose great achievements she celebrated, a decade later, in high-flown funereal verse.

Fielding’s enemies among those literarily inclined were not confined to Grub Street or to the *entourage* of Samuel Richardson. The attack of his follower Smollett (in the first edition of *Peregrine Pickle*, 1751) upon a “trading Westminster justice” who married “his own cook-wench” is too well known to demand further elaboration. Though the passage was afterwards removed it had already run the rounds.¹⁰³ To this bit of scandal may be added the slurring remark of the supercilious young Richard Hurd—of whom more later—

¹⁰² *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, I, 315.

¹⁰³ See page 87.

about the "worn-out rake" and buffoon who, forsooth, was the creator of *Tom Jones*. Finally there was the slanderous story which Horace Walpole (nettled by Fielding's success) wrote in a letter to George Montagu, May 18, 1749. While he professed to find *Tom Jones* "low" and "disgusting"—as we afterwards learn—he kept an eye on the novelist's doings. And when he heard, as he wrote Montagu, that Millar had voluntarily given the author an extra hundred pounds because of the great sale of his book, he drew the celebrated picture of Fielding at Home—"banqueting with a blind man, three Irishmen, and a whore, on some cold mutton and a bone of ham, both in one dish, and the cursedest dirtiest cloth! He never stirred nor asked them to sit. Rigby, who had seen him so often come to beg a guinea of Sir C. Williams, and Bathurst, at whose father's he had lived for victuals, understood that dignity as little, and pulled themselves chairs, on which he civilized."¹⁰⁴ All modern writers agree that by the appellations "blind man," "whore," and "three Irishmen," the amiable Walpole designated, respectively, Fielding's brother, wife, and invited guests. During his long life—for he lived until the end of the century—Walpole continued to scatter his poison. To sum up—the "social contempt," if we may use the phrase of one of Fielding's biographers, which is to be noted in these anecdotes, "extended to his writings."

A more complete view of the attitude of contemporaries toward Fielding and the new *genre* of novel which he had inaugurated must be reserved for a later chapter; but before passing on to a discussion of *Amelia* several outstanding facts should be recorded. In the first place, the old question as to whether or not in the year or two after its publication *Tom Jones* was really popular must be answered by a strong affirmative. In spite of the propaganda of his enemies, political and personal, Fielding's vogue with the reading public between the appearance of *Tom Jones* (1749) and that of *Amelia* (1751) cannot be doubted. From then until the end of the

¹⁰⁴ *Letters of Horace Walpole*, Oxford, 1903, Toynbee edition, II, 383-384.

century the history of Fielding's fame is the story of the rivalry between his works and those of Richardson. On the other hand, it is a remarkable fact that so little unalloyed praise on the part of eminent literary persons has been preserved and handed down to posterity, especially praise that was recorded in any conspicuous place. Even in 1762 when Arthur Murphy wrote his essay on Fielding's life and genius the only commendatory passage which he could find to quote was a footnote concerning the new *genre* of fiction in Warburton's edition of Pope (1751). "In this species of writing," wrote Warburton, "Mr. De Marivaux in France, and Mr. FIELDING in England stand the foremost. And by enriching it with the best part of the *Comic* art, may be said to have brought it to its perfection."¹⁰⁵ Very different was the case with Richardson, who enjoyed the suffrage not only of those who revelled in the new vogue of the sentimental but of the more grave and reverend persons who regarded him as a profound moralist. Poetic tributes to his genius could be gathered with full hands; and, after 1751, everyone knew who it was that had taught the passions to move at the command of virtue. No such good fortune attended Fielding. As we go through the list of notables once again, we realize very keenly that the author and his New Species of Writing were compelled to struggle against heavy odds. Diligent and extended search through the *opera* of his more eminent contemporaries reveals singularly little eulogy—and that little is rarely unmixed. Johnson and Young, as we shall see, were indefatigable in promoting the interests of Richardson; Shenstone and Gray found their pleasure in Richardson rather than in Fielding; the "learned" Miss Carter, despite her defense of *Tom Jones*, confessed her "partiality" for *Clarissa*; and the celebrated Lord Chesterfield, Fielding's friend, though he declared that Richardson was not at home in "high life," allowed him that praise as a novelist which he denied his rival. Not only had Fielding been dragged through the horse-pond of Grub Street scurrility, but he had

¹⁰⁵ *The Works of Alexander Pope*, London, 1751, IV, 169.

been savagely vilified by those higher up in the scale of society and letters—by the sneering Hurd, the envious Richardson, the brutal Smollett, and the scandal-mongering Walpole.

Such was the condition of affairs in 1751, just before the publication of *Amelia*; what brought about this condition will be discussed in a later chapter. Before considering the reception of Fielding's third novel, however, we must put out of our minds for the moment the comparative coldness of the eminent and the critical and give ear to the voice of the great reading public which had greeted *Tom Jones* with such enthusiasm. To show that Fielding's fame in the periodicals had, in the year 1751, increased rather than diminished, the following three notices may fitly end this chapter. By *The Monthly Review*, Fielding's *Enquiry concerning Robbers* received in January this cordial welcome: "The public hath been hitherto not a little obliged to Mr. *Fielding* for the entertainment his gayer performances have afforded it; but now this gentleman hath a different claim to our thanks, for services of a more substantial nature. If he has been heretofore admired for his wit and humour, he now merits equal applause as a good magistrate, a useful and active member, and a true friend to his country. As few writers have shown so just and extensive a knowledge of mankind in general, so none ever had better opportunities for being perfectly acquainted with that class which is the main subject of this performance: a class of all others most necessary and useful to all, yet the most neglected and despised; we mean the labouring part of the people."¹⁰⁶ In April, *The Magazine of Magazines* was equally cordial: "Whosoever is acquainted with his [Fielding's] writings must confess, that there is no body so . . . capable of representing virtue in its own amiable dress, or vice in its native deformity, that has such a thorough insight into the causes and effects of things, is such a master of character, and so able to draw the

¹⁰⁶ *The Monthly Review*, IV, 229. Beginning too late to review *Tom Jones*, this friendly magazine, which often commended Fielding, praised, in July, 1749 (I, 239), his *Charge to the Grand Jury*.

picture of an author, and a reader of every kind."¹⁰⁷ Finally, *The Ladies Magazine* of April 20-May 4, 1751, printed the following verses "On the incomparable History of Tom Jones":

Hail! happy Fielding, who with glorious ease,
Cans't Nature paint, and paint her still to please.

Each humorous incident is finely hit,
With justness, symmetry of parts, and wit.

Nature throughout the drama plays her part,
Behind the curtain lurks assisting art.¹⁰⁸

The three passages just quoted from three different magazines all appeared during 1751. We are not surprised to learn that Andrew Millar paid Fielding a handsome sum¹⁰⁹ for the much smaller novel *Amelia*, which came from the press before the year was out.

¹⁰⁷ *The Magazine of Magazines*, April, 1751.

¹⁰⁸ *The Ladies Magazine*, II, 202.

¹⁰⁹ Wraxall, *Memoirs*, edition of 1836, I, 55-56.

CHAPTER III

Amelia "Damn'd"

1751-1752

WHEN *Amelia* was published (in December, 1751)¹ Fielding was, according to Malone,² "in the highest reputation" as a novelist; for everyone knows that the whole issue was reputed to have been exhausted on the day of its appearance. Even Dr. Johnson was so impressed by this fact that he once declared *Amelia* to be "perhaps the only book, which, being printed off betimes one morning, a new edition was called for before night."³ That the so-called second *edition* was in reality, as may be inferred from the Strahan entries,⁴ only a second *impression*, robs the famous anecdote of some of its glory; but the fact remains that five thousand copies were printed in December, and three thousand more shortly thereafter in January—a large sale indeed for those days. In December, the very month of publication, accounts of the book appeared in *The Monthly Review* and *The London Magazine*—two periodicals friendly to Fielding—and from this fact, as Professor Cross has pointed out, it may be inferred that the editors in both instances were supplied by Millar with advance copies. Naturally enough, no review of the book, for the time being, found a place in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. The article in *The Monthly Review*—a most commendatory one—deserves the following summary:

"The ingenious author,"⁵ says the reviewer, is "already so

¹ Preface dated December 12, 1751; title-page dated 1752.

² *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, seventh ed., London, 1811, I, 223. Malone's note to a letter from Johnson to J. Warton, March 8, 1753.

³ See Piozzi, Mrs. H. L., *Anecdotes of Samuel Johnson*, London, 1786, pp. 221-222.

⁴ See J. P. de Castro's article in *Notes and Queries*, 12 S., III, 466; also *The Bibliographical Society, Transactions*, Second Series, I, 266-267.

⁵ *The Monthly Review*, V, 510 ff., December, 1751.

well known . . . for his talents in novel-writing, and especially that original turn which he gives to all his works in that way, that it would be superfluous to say anything more of his literary character." He commends as the "boldest stroke that has been yet attempted in this species of writing" the fact that "The author takes up his heroine at the very point at which all his predecessors have dropped their capital personage" and "has ventured to give the history of two persons already married." One "who does not peruse this work, will hardly imagine how the relish of such conjugal endearments, as compose the basis of it, could be quickened enough to become palatable to the reader. The author, however, has interwoven such natural situations, such scenes of trial, taken from nature, that the attention is for ever kept on the stretch, and one is led on by the attraction of a curiosity artfully provoked to pursue the *heroine* through all her adventures, and an impatience to know how the married pair will be extricated out of the successive plunges in which they are represented, and in which the writer often successfully presses vice into the service of virtue." Contrasting Fielding with the French novel-writers, who have turned "conjugal love into ridicule," the reviewer continues, "be it said, to the honour of the English, and to this writer in particular, that he never thought so ill of the public, as to make his court to it at the expense of the sacred duties of morality." Whenever the author is obliged to describe his actors as departing "from the paths of virtue and prudence, he is sure to make examples of them, perhaps more salutary, than if he had made them too rigidly adhere to their duty. Their follies and vices are turned so as to become instructions in the issue of them, and which make a far more forcible impression than merely speculative maxims and dry sentences." The chief purpose of the book is "to inculcate the superiority of virtuous conjugal love to all other joys; to prove that virtue chastens our pleasures, only to augment them; and to exemplify, that the paths of vice, are always those of misery, and that virtue even in distress, is still a happier bargain to its votaries, than vice, attended with all the splendor of fortune."

Very few strictures are made in this article. The writer does, indeed, suggest that the sordidness of the characters and situations presented is somewhat "too long dwelt upon"; yet, unlike the generality of contemporary critics, he insists that it would be "an absurd affectation" in novels "of common life" to omit all such matter, "in compliance to a false delicacy, which calls everything *Low*, that does not relate to a high sphere of life." Touching upon a question which has often been discussed since, he declares that Booth is, by his "own remorse for the injury done to his amiable, virtuous wife," so severely punished for "his one guilty step" that his weakness becomes "a moral warning." Amelia is "the model of female perfection, formed to give the greatest and justest idea of domestic happiness. She fills every character, in every scene, in every situation, where the tender, agreeable wife, the prudent fond mother, and the constant friend can have leave to shine." Atkinson has too undeserved a fate; but, on the whole, the book is entirely true to life—even "the stories of Miss *Matthews*, and Mrs *Bennet*" contributing "a due share towards unravelling the plot of the history."

Far less fortunate—in fact, most unfortunate—was the account given by the reviewer for *The London Magazine*, who, though probably not antagonistic toward Fielding, was looking perhaps for another *Tom Jones* and therefore did not enjoy or understand this new venture in the way of a more sober realism and a more outspoken castigation of current abuses. At any rate, the article is little else than a résumé of the plot, with a few patronizing strictures subjoined. "The story is amusing," the writer admits, "the characters kept up, and [there are] many reflections which are useful, if the reader will but take notice of them, which in this unthinking age it is to be feared very few will." He then searches for anachronisms, and finds, of course, a "glaring one," which he proves with triumphant labor. He is very much worried about the wonderful restoration of Amelia's nose, as was Dr. Johnson later. He is horrified to discover that Fielding in the second chapter of the eighth book has made light of English Liberty, and proceeds

to give at some length a typical eighteenth-century harangue on the virtues of the English Constitution. Apparently ignoring the entire force of Fielding's attack, he hopes the author in his next novel will direct his satire toward *public* corruption as well as private vice. In view of the fact that the chief secondary purpose of *Amelia* was to reform certain legal abuses in England (see Book I, ch. ii, in which Fielding insists that a justice of the peace should have "some knowledge of the law"), the accusation that Fielding had neglected to denounce public corruption was preposterous. Incredible as it may appear, the most damaging discovery which the reviewer made was the seemingly innocent one regarding the nose of the heroine—but that is a story yet to be told.⁶

As for *The Gentleman's Magazine*, December, January, and February went by and that periodical maintained its customary silence; but in the latter month there appeared in the *Journal Britannique* a long account of *Amelia*, which, despite much grumbling, wound up with a fine flourish. The editor of this periodical, whom Gibbon eulogized and Johnson referred to as a little "black dog," was the rather well-known Dr. Maty. Richardsonian as he was, Maty acknowledged certain commendable qualities in *Amelia*. "Je crois pouvoir dire," he writes, "que quelques uns des incidents sont ou peu naturels ou mal amenés, que le dénouement n'est ni bien préparé ni suffisamment éclairci, qu'il n'y a point assez de noblesse & de consistance dans divers caractères, que des digressions étrangères & une érudition déplacée allongent inutilement le Roman, mais j'aime à pardonner ces défauts à l'Auteur, dont la plume n'est moins chaste que spirituelle, & qui sait également dévoiler la Nature & annoblir l'humanité."⁷

To make humanity nobler by drawing the veil from its faults was Fielding's serious intention not only in *Amelia* but in his new periodical, *The Covent-Garden Journal*, the first

⁶ *The London Magazine*, XX, 531, 592, 596 (December, 1751).

⁷ *Journal Britannique*, VII, 123-146 (February, 1752). For an excellent French appreciation of *Amelia*, see Clément, P., *Cinq années littéraires*, Letter 91 (London, January 1, 1752).

number of which is dated January 4, 1752. Even from his earliest days he had possessed the spirit of a reformer; and surely his was an age in which reforms were needed. Religion, law, politics, society, the press—all were unblushingly corrupt; and the condition of the lower classes, as Fielding had realized ever more keenly in his work as a magistrate, was a disgrace to any country that called itself civilized. Once again, therefore, he entered the field of journalism.

The announcement of *The Covent-Garden Journal*, which appeared in the columns of *The London Daily Advertiser* as early as November 1, 1751, set all Grub Street agog; and after *Amelia* was published, on the eighteenth of the following month, novel and newspaper together were, until the latter came to its termination, the theme of much rancorous abuse. Only a few days after the publication of *Amelia*, Fielding's ancient enemy *Old England* was rejoicing over "the almost lifeless Corpse" of this "poor, wretched, departing *Novel*," advising its readers that "a true and faithful Account of her debauched Life, Amours,"⁸ etc., will be found in *The Covent-Garden Journal*, the advertisement of which, as has been remarked, had already appeared. By Fielding's new periodical, writes *Old England*, "The Debauched, the Diseased, the Rotting and Rotten, may be instructed and amused, if not cured and reformed: Here will be seen the quaint Device; the old Badger preaching Continence to the young *Wolf*,—the Type of *Impotence* correcting *Vice*!" In the course of this attack, Fielding is made to say: "I once thought, and almost still think, *Tom Jones* (which has all my Wit and Humour)⁹ my great Masterpiece: But the SALE however not answering my Bookseller's Expectation, I am now persuaded . . . to say the same of *Amelia*. . . ." A week later, *Old England* took another fling at Fielding's "Wit and Humour,"¹⁰ and then, silent

⁸ *Old England*, December 21, 1751. *Amelia* was published on December 18.

⁹ "I have employed all the wit and humour of which I am master in the following history." See Dedication of *Tom Jones*.

¹⁰ *Old England*, December 28, 1751. See Jensen's edition of *The Covent-Garden Journal*, New Haven, 1915, I, 40.

for a short interval, stored up its venom against his appearance as Sir Alexander Drawcansir.

From January 4, 1752, the date of the first issue, until the final number was published, November 25, 1752, *Amelia* and her creator were assailed with exceptional coarseness and vigor. Almost from the beginning, the "Paper War" between *The Covent-Garden Journal* and *The Inspector*, which Fielding had commenced in jest, was treacherously converted by Hill into a veritable hard-hitting battle, in the turmoil of which the novelist's enemies found their opportunity. Amongst a crowd of unidentified scribblers we recognize the familiar figures not only of Hill himself but of Fielding's old defamers, Kenrick and Smollett, as well as that of a newcomer in the fray, Bonnell Thornton. The engagements between periodical and pamphlet, burlesque and lampoon, afforded the town a very interesting diversion—even now, as we glance down the pages of the forgotten broadsides, we come across passages here and there of genuine and uproarious fun; but since bitter personal antagonisms were involved, many a foul stroke was delivered by Fielding's assailants, and their general conduct was indecent and scurrilous in the extreme. The reputation of the pure and womanly *Amelia*, owing to the unfortunate slip about her nose, was reduced to that of a common strumpet.

Only the outlines of the famous Hill-Fielding quarrel¹¹ can be given here—only those details which relate particularly to the treatment of Fielding's novel; but the following account will no doubt be sufficient. We begin, accordingly, with the principal character of the opposition, Dr. John Hill. On a number of previous occasions, as has been seen, this facile and enterprising person had paid very high compliments to Fielding and had freely made use of his name and fame in puffs and prefaces to his own productions. But though in his *Inspector* of January 8, 1752, he did not as yet show his teeth, contenting

¹¹ For an account of the "Paper War" see *The Covent-Garden Journal*, edited by G. E. Jensen; and Chapter xxv ("Battle of the Wits") in Cross's *Fielding*.

himself merely with jibing references to a heroine who was able to "charm the World without the Help of a Nose," he became in the next number, January 9, 1752, as Professor Jensen has pointed out, "seriously abusive."¹² *Old England* was, of course, delighted. On January 11, following an indecent attack on Fielding by Hill (in *The Inspector* of January 10), this periodical gave vent to an abusive burlesque on the "superannuated Virago, now called Goody *Drawcansir*," whom it characterizes as "a bawdy Novelist" in his dotage.¹³ Fielding, however, accustomed to such treatment, maintained his equable temper; and—on the same day—inserted in the third number of his journal the following intelligence: "It is currently reported that a famous Surgeon, who absolutely cured one Mrs. Amelia Booth, of a violent Hurt in her Nose, insomuch, that she had scarce a scar left on it, intends to bring Actions against several ill meaning and slanderous People, who have reported that the said Lady had no Nose, merely because the Author of her History, in a Hurry, forgot to inform his Readers of that Particular, and which, if those readers had had any Nose themselves, except that which is mentioned in the Motto of this Paper, they would have smelt it out."¹⁴ The "Motto," by the way, was an apt quotation from Martial: "*Et Pueri Nasum Rhinocerotis habent.*"¹⁴ This good-humored remonstrance had, of course, no mollifying effect upon Fielding's assailants. The opportunity offered—nay, almost invited—by the novelist's inadvertence concerning the nose of his heroine was too good to be easily relinquished by an eighteenth-century calumniator.

On January 15, Fielding's old enemy, the King of the Beggars, came to the fore, parodying, in his advertisement to an edition of his *Apology*, the celebrated device which Millar had used to stimulate interest in *Amelia*.¹⁵ And, on the same

¹² Jensen, I, 42.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 47-48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 47, 147.

¹⁵ *The London Daily Advertiser*, January 15; *The General Advertiser*, January 1; and *The Whitehall Evening Post*, November 7-9. See Jensen, I, 53.

day, a really formidable antagonist lent his assistance to the forces of Grub Street; this was the envious Tobias Smollett, who, by the way, had been almost as much intrigued by the success of *Tom Jones* as Richardson himself. In the first edition of *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), as we have noted, Smollett had attacked Lyttelton (who was of a lean habit of body) as "Gosling Scrag" and Fielding as "Mr. Spondy," advising the latter that "when he is inclined to marry his own cook-wench, his gracious patron may condescend to give the bride away; and finally settle him in his old age, as a trading Westminster justice." So far as we know, Fielding had never deigned a reply to this insult; but in the second number of his *Covent-Garden Journal*, January 7, 1752, he had referred to *Roderick Random* in a playful *communiqué* about a recent skirmish which had taken place between the Forces under Sir Alexander Drawcansir and the Army of Grub Street. This bit of war news ran as follows:

A little before our March . . . we sent a large Body of Forces, under the Command of General A. Millar, to take Possession of the most eminent Printing-Houses. The greater Part of these were garrisoned by Detachments from the Regiment of Grub-Street, who all retired at the Approach of our Forces. A small Body, indeed, under the Command of one Peeragrin Puckle, made a slight Shew of Resistance; but his Hopes were soon found to be in *Vain*; and, at the first Report of the Approach of a younger Brother of General Thomas Jones, his whole Body immediately disappeared, and totally overthrew some of their own Friends, who were marching to their Assistance, under the Command of one Rodorick Random. This Rodorick, in a former Skirmish with the People called Critics, had owed some slight Success more to the Weakness of the Critics, than to any Merit of his own.¹⁶

The irascible Scot, who had been nursing his wrath to keep it warm, now fought shoulder to shoulder with the legions of Grub Street and discharged at Fielding a venomous twenty-

¹⁶ *The Covent-Garden Journal*, No. 2, January 7, 1752 (Jensen, I, 145).

eight page pamphlet entitled, *A Faithful Narrative of the base and inhuman Arts . . . lately practised upon the Brain of Habbakkuk Hilding*.¹⁷ Fielding is here represented as in a state of insanity brought about by a potion administered by "Gosling Scrag." Scrag (*i.e.*, Lyttelton), so runs the story, unsuccessful in his attempt to make Hilding take charge of the forces against their enemies, particularly against that "rascal Peregrine Pickle, who hath brought us both to ridicule and shame," had finally resorted to the application of drugs, as the result of which, Hilding, now mentally deranged, was prosecuting the present Newspaper War. To make a long story short, this scurrilous production accuses Fielding of stealing from *Roderick Random* the characters of Miss Williams and Strap for those of Miss Matthews and Partridge, makes game of Jones's illegitimacy and Amelia's noselessness, and subjects Fielding's private character to journalistic manhandling. *Habbakkuk Hilding*, attributed to Smollett by *The Gentleman's Magazine*, did more damage, no doubt, than most of the anonymous pamphlets of the Newspaper War; for his reputation as a novelist was now so well established that a word from him was eagerly read. As might have been imagined, the sneer at Fielding in the popular *Peregrine Pickle* had not gone unnoticed; Richard Graves, for instance, called Shenstone's attention to it, as we learn from a letter dated September 17, 1751. "You tell me," wrote Shenstone, "The Author of *Peregrine Pickle* says, if you will flatter Mr. Lyttelton well, he will at last make you a Middlesex Justice."¹⁸ In the second edition of his novel, Smollett removed the offensive allusion, and—over a decade after Fielding's death—inserted in his *History of England* a commendatory reference to his great rival—but

¹⁷ Advertised in the *London Daily Advertiser* for "This Day at Noon," January 15, 1752. *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January, 1752, p. 29) says this pamphlet is "supposed to be written by the author of *Peregrine Pickle*." See the reprint of the pamphlet in the *Works* of Smollett, edited by W. E. Henley, Westminster, 1901, XII, 165-186.

¹⁸ *The Works . . . of . . . William Shenstone*, third ed., London, 1773, III, 187.

of this more will be said in another place. The compliment, though just and well expressed, was rather tardy in arriving.

On January 16—to return to the “Paper War”—the day after the publication of *Habbakkuk Hilding*, still another enemy, Bonnell Thornton, commenced operations in *The Drury-Lane Journal*, in the first number of which, aside from general abuse of Fielding, a special assault was made upon *Amelia* in the form of a mock advertisement for a certain *Shamelia*. This supposed novel, runs Thornton’s skit, is published in “four Volumes Duodecimo, with the help of Dedication, Introductory Chapters, polite Expletives of Conversation, genteel Dialogues, a wide margin, and a large Letter, Price but 12 s.”

Two days before the appearance of *The Drury-Lane Journal*, Fielding had “concluded” his “Journal of the War” by publishing, in Number Four of his paper, articles of peace between “Sir Alexander Drawcansir” and “their Lownesses the Republic of Grub-Street,” it being “hereby declared, agreed, and ratified, that all Kinds of Scurrility, [and] personal Abuse” shall “henceforth be acknowledged” to be “the sole and undoubted Property of the Low Republic of Grub-Street aforesaid.” But as the attacks upon him still continued, he made a second venture in Number Five, January 18, 1752. His enemies, he says, have resorted to the use of “ragged Bullets” and “poisoned Arrows.” Regarding his own practice in *The Covent-Garden Journal* he writes, “as Nothing is less agreeable to my own Disposition than private Abuse, so Nothing is more foreign to the Plan of this Paper.” The insults that have been heaped upon him by his assailants he regards as a natural result of his attempt to cleanse the Augean stable of Grub Street, “since no Man, I believe, ever removed great Quantities of Dirt from any Place, without finding some of it sticking to his Skirts.”¹⁹

During the war, occasional friendly services were, of course, rendered Fielding in various papers and magazines by

¹⁹ Jensen, I, 157 ff., 162, 164.



MAJOR BATH SURPRISED

anonymous admirers. On the same date (January 18, 1752) as that of the number of *The Covent-Garden Journal* just quoted, there appeared the following commendatory verses in *The General Advertiser*. Replying to Hill's charge that Fielding's spirit is "dead and gone," the author writes:

What hear we now, astonish'd Readers cry,
No Spirit in the Scenes of *Amely*!
Where Wit with Sense, Instruction with Delight,
Keeps pace, where Virtue shines in purest white:
Where keenest Satire plays the justest Part;
Stings deep, and only stings the guilty Heart.²⁰

The attacks of Fielding's enemies, however, continued to be so active, persistent, and virulent that in the seventh and eighth numbers (January 25 and January 28) of his *Covent-Garden Journal*, the novelist published his defense—long since celebrated—of his much abused heroine. At the "Court of Censorial Enquiry," Amelia, "indicted upon the Statute of Dulness," is "set to the Bar," and the examination begins. Councillor Town takes upon himself to prove that Amelia herself "is a *low* Character, a *Fool*, and a *Milksop*"; that she exerts "*no Manner of Spirit*, unless, perhaps in supporting Afflictions"; that her "*not abusing*" her husband "for having lost his Money at Play, when she saw his Heart was already almost broke by it, *was contemptible Meanness*"; that she is so low and servile as to dress her husband's supper with her own hands; and that, finally, she is "a Beauty WITHOUT A NOSE"; that Dr. Harrison is "a very *low, dull, unnatural*, Character," and that Colonel Bath is a "*foolish*" one, "*very low, and ill-drawn*"; that "the Scene" of the Jail is "*low and unmeaning*," and brought in "without any Reason; or Design"; and that the "whole Book is a Heap of *sad Stuff, Dulness, and Nonsense*"; and should be made an example of for daring to "stand up in Opposition to the Humour of the Age."

After Lady Dillydally had alleged on hearsay that *Amelia* was "sad Stuff from beginning to End," a "Great Number of

²⁰ Quoted by Jensen, I, 56.

Beaus, Rakes, fine Ladies, and several formal Persons with bushy Wigs, and Canes at their Noses," pushed forward as "Witnesses against poor Amelia," when "a grave Man stood up and begged to be heard"; inasmuch as the "Prisoner at the Bar" was his "favourite Child." He has, he asserts, "bestowed a more than ordinary Pains in her Education"; and, though he does not think her entirely "free from Faults," he is sure that she "doth not deserve the Rancour with which she hath been treated by the Public." It is not his intention "to make any Defence"; but, submitting to "a Compromise," he "will trouble the World no more with any Children" of his "by the same Muse."²¹

One would think that so sweet-tempered an *apologia pro filia sua* might have softened the rigor of Fielding's enemies. Such, however, was not the case; the author's acknowledgment that he had been vanquished was made the occasion of increased rejoicing by Bonnell Thornton, in the columns of his *Drury-Lane Journal*. After burlesquing the style of the novel in his second issue, he directed his energies in the third number (January 30), to the following parody on Fielding's own "advertisement":

Whereas it has been reported by the *sharp-nos'd* Gentlemen, the Critics, that AMELIA *has no nose*, because her Biographer has inform'd us, in the beginning of her History, that *her lovely nose was* beat all to pieces; This is to certify that the said Report is malicious, false, and ill-grounded; and that the said Author has taken care to obviate it, by telling us, in the said History, when the Cherry Brandy was pour'd over poor Mrs. Atkinson, that AMELIA'S *delicate nose soon smelt it out*.

While the derisive Thornton continued to scoff in succeeding numbers of his *Drury-Lane Journal*—adding to the novel a scurrilous "NEW CHAPTER" (on February 6) and jeering at Amelia's noselessness (on February 15)—Fielding's old enemy William Kenrick, already busy to evil purpose in the columns of *Old England*, subjected Fielding's heroine (and,

²¹ Jensen, I, 178-180; 186-187.

for that matter, the author himself and all his works) to particular and extended ignominy by introducing her as a character in a piece of elaborate foolery entitled "FUN. A Paroditragi-comical SATIRE. As it was to have been performed . . . February 13, 1752, but suppress'd by a special Order from the Lord Mayor." This production—a parody on *Macbeth*—in which the author ridicules not only Fielding but also Hill, Thornton, and other writers of the day, is at times, despite its vulgarity, undeniably witty and ludicrous. Circling about the cauldron, the Weird Sisters cast therein, as they go by, contemporary novels, periodicals, and pamphlets: *Clarissa*, the virtue of *Pamela*, *Pickle*; Hill's books—*Valet*, *Loveill*, and *Creole*; and, finally, that the infernal "Charm" may have a sovereign potency, the First Witch cries, as she holds up Fielding's novel:

To add to these and make a pois'nous Stench,
Here take 4 Ounces of a *noseless wench*.

During the course of the action the following dialogue occurs between Mountain (Hill) and Drawcansir (Fielding):

Moun. . . . she has undone thee, Drawcansir; she has ruin'd thee.

Dr. Dost thou join Ruin with *Amelia's Name*?

Doth she not come replete with Wealth and Honour?

Moun. O no *Drawcansir*! She has robb'd thy Name
Of that high Rank and Lustre which it boasted;
Has level'd thee with Men of common Fame,
Has made thee a Picture for the Hand of Scorn
To point her slow and moving Finger at.
There's not a Boy, or Porter in the Streets,
But casts the base *Amelia* in thy teeth.

In these lines, unfortunately for Fielding, there was more truth than fiction. The prophetic obituary, which had appeared as early as January 20 in *The Covent-Garden Journal Extraordinary*, had come true:

On *Sunday* last, in the Evening were privately interred the Remains of Mrs. *Amelia Booth*, who fell a Sacrifice to the poisonous

Influence of evil Tongues. A Lady who was possessed of all the domestick Virtues of Life; and so remarkable for her Meekness of Disposition, as to have equalled the Fame of *Patient Grissel*. The Expence of her Funeral was defrayed by his Excellency Sir *Alexander*, who was deeply affected with her Fate, and now begs that no Person will be so cruel and impious as to disturb her Ashes.

To proceed further with a detailed account of the Newspaper War is unnecessary. After a few more weeks, Fielding's novel ceased to be one of the major objects of attack, and during the spring and summer, was, comparatively speaking, neglected except for occasional sallies. But late in the fall, when *The Covent-Garden Journal* was given up, and the customary mock-obituaries of that periodical ran the rounds of hostile paragraphers, *Amelia* came in for a share of the old coarseness and truculency. In one instance, indeed, the book was purposely ignored. "The last Will and Testament" of Alexander Drawcansir, which appeared in Thornton's *Spring-Garden Journal*, December 7, contains the following items:

My Manuscript of *Joseph Andrews* I leave to Parson Y——, my Chaplain and Quotation-hunter. . . .

My *Tom Jones* I leave to the *Foundling Hospital*, as a Token of Gratitude and Respect.

But of *Amelia* there was never a word.

During the conflict Fielding had not been without friends, but the admirers of *Amelia* were few in number. Among these, however, was a certain "Criticulus," whose contribution—perhaps because Johnson was less hostile this time, or more probably because the topic in its connection with the Newspaper War was of general interest—found a place in the March number of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which, by the way, had never condescended to review Fielding's novel. The worthy "Criticulus" devotes much of his brief space to the detection of anachronisms; but the rest of it he bestows on a vindication of the book. He thinks that *Amelia* has been too "severely handled by some modern critics" and trusts that what

Mr. Fielding gave out in the Court of Criticism of his *Covent-Garden Journal* was only said "in his warmth and indignation of this injurious treatment." In spite of their imperfections, he believes that "some of the characters" "are handled in so masterly a manner," that "virtue and vice" meet with such "due rewards," and that there are so many "noble reflections on the follies and vices . . . of human nature," that "he must be both a bad and ill-natur'd reader, who is not by it agreeably entertain'd, instructed, and improved."²²

Another anonymous writer, supposed to be—despite his denial—the physician and antiquary Dr. John Kennedy, attributing the failure of *Amelia* not to the fault of the author but to the depravity of the age itself, defends the book in an anti-Hill pamphlet entitled *Some Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. J—— H——*. The following passage, called forth by Hill's abuse of Fielding's heroine, occurs in a letter which purports to have been written to a friend in the country: "You ask me for the opinion of the town, and my own of Mr. Fielding's 'Amelia.' I must own to you, they are very different, if we are to form a judgment of the opinion of the town by the sale of the work, which has not as yet gone thro' a second edition. . . . Were I to take it from the circle of my own acquaintance, I should mention 'Amelia' to you as a most finished performance." "What you take notice of as to Amelia's nose," he continues, "was an omission . . . which has occasioned a vast deal of low wit, and been a standing joke here. I dare say it will be emended in any future edition." In his opinion the accusation of lowness preferred against the novel is a sure indication of the lowness of the public taste; to himself and to "the judicious few" Fielding's heroine is "inestimable."²³

At the end of the year (December, 1752), the author of another anti-Hill broadside paid Fielding a rather unusual compliment. The following four lines, from *The Inspector's*

²² *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXII, 102 (March, 1752).

²³ Quoted by Cross, *Fielding*, II, 348. Regarding the authorship of the pamphlet, see Jensen, I, 70 note.

Rhapsody . . . on the Loss of his Wig, may be given for what they are worth:

For fame let *Fielding* scratch his pensive head,
Fame I [Hill] despise, I scribble but for bread;
Let him his labours polish and retouch,
He may write better, but not near so much!

Thus the fact that Fielding actually did take pains with his work was not entirely unnoticed by his contemporaries. But we must now bid adieu to the land of anonymia and speak of a major figure among Hill's antagonists, Christopher Smart.

Even before the Newspaper War, this worthy but unfortunate man (whom Fielding befriended) was one of the novelist's most devoted admirers. In his periodical *The Midwife*, Smart made more than one reference to characters in *Tom Jones* (e.g., to Squire Western, II, 101), and asserted that in respect to "wit" Fielding deserved a place with Lucian, Swift, Butler, and Erasmus. In a later number, while commending Murphy's imitation of *The Covent-Garden Journal* in *The Gray's-Inn Journal*, he declared "that 'tis a certain Test of true Humour to be delighted with the Writings of Mr. *Fielding*" (III, 137); and in January, 1753, he inserted an excellent tribute to his friend in the preface to a satirical poem entitled "The Hilliad" (directed at their common enemy, Dr. John Hill). "Through all Mr. Fielding's inimitable comic Romances," wrote Smart, "we perceive no such thing as personal malice, no private character dragged into light." He then praised Fielding's realism ("every scene of life is . . . represented in its natural colours"), and his work as a reformer (he ridicules "every species of folly or humour" with "the most exquisite touches"). In short, "A genius like this is perhaps more useful to mankind, than any [other] class of writers; he serves to dispel all gloom from our minds, to work off our ill-humours by the gay sensations excited by a well directed pleasantry, and in a vein of mirth he leads his readers into the knowledge of human nature; the most useful and pleasing

science we can apply to."²⁴ At the end of "The Hilliad" itself, Smart pictured Hill as remaining the "ARCH-DUNCE,"

While with joint force o'er humour's droll domain,

Cervantes, Fielding, Lucian, Swift, shall reign.²⁵

From the admirable eulogistic verses written years after the novelist's death we learn that Smart had a genuine appreciation of *Amelia*; but even at that time, as we shall see, there were comparatively few who shared that pleasure with him. And during the squabbles of 1752 even those who used their pens in a common cause with Fielding were noticeably reticent about praising a novel which had been so bandied about in newspaper and pamphlet. As we take into account the incessant scurrility which was directed at the ill-starred heroine, Dr. Johnson's assertion to the effect that the sale of *Amelia* (at first so gratifying to author and publisher) was spoiled by that "vile broken nose," is seen to be, in the main, a statement of actual fact. In their attacks upon *Tom Jones*, Fielding's defamers, it should be observed, were practically unanimous in conceding that the novel had been "greedily swallowed" by the public—that, in fact, was the principal cause of their wrath; in their onslaughts upon "poor" *Amelia*, they were equally unanimous in declaring that the book had been a failure—for had not the author admitted it himself?

Fielding's assailants, meanwhile, were not confined to Grub Street. Among the crowd of persons who had been eager to appear as witnesses against *Amelia* were Samuel Richardson and his female adorers. From one of these, Mrs. Delany, we have the following testimony, in a letter to Mrs. Dewes, dated January 18, 1752. "We are reading Mr. Fielding's *Amelia*. Mrs. Don. and I don't like it at all; D. D. [Dr. Delany] won't listen to it. It has more a moral design than either ap-

²⁴ "The Hilliad," London, 1753, p. viii (bound with *Poems on Several Occasions*, London, 1752). In *The Impertinent* (August 13, 1752), Hill asserted that Smart wrote because he was "hungry": Fielding, because he had "wit"—that is, the wit of a buffoon.

²⁵ "The Hilliad," p. 44.

pears in Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones, but has not so much humour; it neither makes one laugh or cry, though there are some very dismal scenes described, but there is something wanting to make them touching. I shall be glad to have your opinion; some *few* people here like it. Our next important reading will be Betty Thoughtless; I wish Richardson would publish his *good man*, and put all these frivolous authors out of countenance."²⁶ To call the author of *Amelia* a frivolous author is certainly refreshing! But if one were to believe the newspapers—and, for that matter, the author of *Clarissa* himself—was not Fielding a buffoon?

Not long after this we have the opinion of another Richardsonian, Miss Mulso (later Mrs. Chapone). In a letter to Miss Carter, February 11, she says, "Mr. — tells me that you are a friend to Fielding's *Amelia*. I love the woman, but for the book—it must have merit, since Miss Carter and some few good judges approve of it." In the course of an extended critique—for she stands somewhat in awe of her learned friend—we find the following query: "And is there not a tendency in all his [Fielding's] works, to soften the deformity of vice, by placing characters in an amiable light, that are destitute of every virtue except good nature?"²⁷

On the same day, still another member of the group, Mrs. Donnellan, was writing to Richardson himself. "Will you leave us to Capt. Booth and Betty Thoughtless for our examples?" she asks. "As for poor *Amelia*, she is so great a fool we pity her, but cannot be humble enough to desire to imitate her.

Now, perhaps, you have not read this stuff, but I desire you will, and then I think your conscience must make you publish [Grandison]." The last sentence, which is sufficiently illuminating as regards the popular attitude in certain quarters toward Fielding, runs as follows: "Poor Fielding, I believe, designed to be good, but did not know how, and in the attempt lost his genius, low humour."²⁸

²⁶ *The Autobiography of Mrs. Delany*, London, 1861, III, 79.

²⁷ *The Works of Mrs. Chapone*, London, 1807, I, 45, 46.

²⁸ *Correspondence of Richardson*, IV, 55-56 (February 11, 1752).

Richardson had kept a close watch, presumably through Fielding's sister, upon what his rival was doing. Even before *Amelia* was published he had taken pains to inform Lady Bradshaigh that in Newgate Prison, "removed from," the "inns and alehouses" of Fielding's former books "will some of his next scenes [*i.e.*, of *Amelia*], be laid"; adding the pious comment: "perhaps not unusefully; I hope not. But to have done, for the present, with this fashionable author."²⁹ When *Amelia* actually appeared and was subjected to the abuse of journalists and pamphleteers, Richardson was in high feather. The attacks on Fielding during the Newspaper War of 1752 he followed with the greatest avidity. At the time the letter from Mrs. Donnellan arrived he was gloating over his rival's *apologia*; in fact he delayed a reply to her until he had dispatched a note to his friend Edwards, who, he knew, would rejoice with him. In the following letter one can almost *see* Richardson drawing a long face and rubbing his hands. "Mr. Fielding," he writes, "has met with the disapprobation you foresaw he would meet with, of his *Amelia*. He is, in every paper he publishes under the title of the Common Garden, contributing to his overthrow. He has been overmatched in his own way by people whom he had despised, and whom he thought he had vogue enough, from the success his spurious brat Tom Jones so unaccountably met with, to write down; but who have turned his own artillery against him, and beat him out of the field, and made him even poorly in his Court of Criticism give up his *Amelia*, and promise to write no more on the like subjects."³⁰

On the following day, February 22, 1752, in his reply³¹ to Mrs. Donnellan, the little printer was even more exultant: "Will I leave you to Captain Booth? Capt. Booth, Madam, has done his own business. Mr. Fielding has over-written himself, or rather *under-written*; and in his own journal seems

²⁹ *Correspondence of Richardson*, IV, 286.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 33, 34 (February 21, 1752).

³¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 59-60.

ashamed of his last piece; and has promised that the same Muse shall write no more for him. The piece, in short, is as dead as if it had been published forty years ago, as to sale." Richardson had read, indeed, "but the first volume," when he "found the characters and situations so wretchedly low and dirty" that he "imagined" he "could not be interested for any one of them."

Did Fielding realize that Richardson was traducing him? Did his sister Sally tell him? If she did, he must have had greater magnanimity than even he is known to have possessed. In the tenth number of that very *Covent-Garden Journal*³² which Richardson was maligning, *i.e.*, about two weeks before the present letter, Fielding had gone out of his way to allude to the "ingenious Author of *Clarissa*." But the "ingenious Author," now in his glory, was deaf to all feelings save that of malicious exultation; in the remainder of his letter he thus proceeds to enlighten Mrs. Donnellan regarding Fielding the Man. "In his *Tom Jones*," writes the logical Richardson, "his hero is made a natural child, because his own first wife was such." As for the hero, Tom, he is "Fielding himself, hardened in some places, softened in others." Lady Bellaston is "an infamous woman of his former acquaintance." His Sophia is "again his first wife"; Booth, "in his last piece, again himself"; while "Amelia, even to her noselessness, is again his first wife"; and his "brawls, his jarrs, his gaols, his spunging-houses, are all drawn from what he has seen and known." This amazing epistle concludes as follows: "As I said (witness also his hamper plot)"—apparently the matter had been elucidated before—"he has little or no invention: and admirably do you observe, that by several strokes in his *Amelia* he designed to be good, but knew not how, and lost his genius, low humour in the attempt." No doubt the rough-and-tumble warfare on the part of scurrilous journalists and pamphleteers was a great factor in obscuring from the view of contemporaries the true altitude of Fielding's genius; but the malignant insinuations of

³² *The Covent-Garden Journal*, No. 10, February 4, 1752 (Jensen, I, 193).

Richardson not only injured Fielding among certain persons of his own generation whose opinion was of value, but, after the *Correspondence* (in part) was published in 1804, were injurious to his later fame.

Perhaps the most extraordinary of all the Richardson letters in Mrs. Barbauld's volumes is the following one, addressed to Lady Bradshaigh, February 23, 1752, the day after the epistle to Mrs. Donnellan. Now that *Amelia* was apparently a failure, Richardson made so bold as to strike at Fielding through the latter's own sister. As Sally Fielding was his ardent adorer, it may be imagined that this was not the first time he had spoken to her about her brother's depravity. "Poor Fielding!" exclaims the pious Richardson, "I could not help telling his sister, that I was equally surprised at and concerned for his continued lowness. Had your brother, said I, been born in a stable, or been a runner at a sponging-house, we should have thought him a genius, and wished he had had the advantage of a liberal education, and of being admitted into good company; but it is beyond my conception, that a man of family, and who had some learning, and who really is a writer, should descend so excessively low, in all his pieces. Who can care for any of his people? A person of honour asked me, the other day, what he could mean, by saying, in his Covent Garden Journal, that he had followed Homer and Virgil, in his *Amelia*. I answered, that he was justified in saying so, because he must mean Cotton's Virgil Travestied; where the women are drabs, and the men scoundrels."⁸³ As Sir Leslie Stephen justly remarks, "It is painful to read this kind of stuff."⁸⁴

In the opinion of Richardson and the Richardsonians in general—Mrs. Delany, Mrs. Donnellan, Miss Mulso, and others—*Amelia* was "wretchedly low and dirty." But the most distinguished of his female admirers, Miss Elizabeth Carter, made a strong protest against the abuse which was heaped upon the ill-starred heroine. Greatly as she admired Richardson, the "learned" Miss Carter, as we have seen, had always exerted

⁸³ *Correspondence of Richardson*, VI, 154-155.

⁸⁴ *The Works of Samuel Richardson*, I, xxiv (London, 1883).

herself in defense of Fielding. "It must surely be a marvellous wrong-headedness and perplexity of understanding," she had written of *Joseph Andrews*, "that can make any one consider this complete satire as a very immoral thing, and of the most dangerous tendency"; she was "sorry" that her friend Miss Talbot was "so outrageous about poor Tom Jones"; and now we find her rendering assistance to the distressed *Amelia*.

In a letter dated March 14, 1752, Miss Talbot, writing to Miss Carter from the deanery of St. Paul's, gives the following interesting account of the perusal of the book by Martin Benson, then Bishop of Gloucester. "I have not read 'Amelia' yet," she says, "but have seen it read and commented upon much to my edification by that good Bishop of Gloucester, who seldom misses spending two or three days of the week at this deanery. . . . I have been particularly delighted with some of our afternoons, when we have sat unmolested by my dressing room fire-side, he reading 'Amelia' (and quarreling excessively at the two first volumes) my mother and I reading or working, or following our own devices as it might happen."³⁵ This account drew from Miss Carter the following spirited rejoinder: "In favour of the Bishop of Gloucester's cold, his reading *Amelia* in silence may be tolerated, but I am somewhat scandalized that since he did not read it to you, you did not read it yourself. Methinks I long to engage you on the side of this poor unfortunate book, which I am told the fine folks are unanimous in pronouncing to be very sad stuff. The Bishop of Gloucester's excessive sad quarrel with the two first volumes I am determined to conclude proceeded from the effects of his cold." Then—recalling Miss Mulso's diatribe—she concludes, "How to account for Miss Mulso's unmerciful severity to *Amelia* is past my skill, as it does not appear but that she was in very good health when she read the book."³⁶ After this, it is not surprising that in her reply Miss Talbot was less "outrageous" about *Amelia* than she had been regarding *Tom Jones*.

³⁵ *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, II, 69.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 71-72 (March 30, 1751).

She writes: "At last we have begun *Amelia*, it is very entertaining. I do love Dr. Harrison and the good Serjeant; and Mrs. James's visit to *Amelia* has extremely diverted me. How many Mrs. James's in that good-for-nothing London!" Still, before she gets through, Miss Talbot cannot refrain from saying, "But Mr. Fielding's heroines are always silly loving runaway girls [Presumably a reminiscence from Richardson]. *Amelia* makes an excellent wife, but why did she marry Booth?"³⁷

Miss Talbot, it would seem, was fairly amenable; Miss Mulso, on the other hand, continued to be recalcitrant—as the following letter will show: "‘Rather frail than wicked!’ Dear Miss Carter! that is what I complain of, that Fielding contrives to gloss over gross and monstrous faults in such a manner that even his virtuous readers shall call them frailties.

. . . Had I not reason to accuse the author of ‘softening or hiding the deformity of vice,’ when infidelity, adultery, gaming, and extravagance . . . are so gently reproved, even by Miss Carter? ‘His amour with Miss Mathews,’ you say, ‘however blameable, was attended with some alleviating circumstances;’ what these were I am unable to discover. . . . Indeed . . . I should not have cared sixpence had the book ended with his being hanged.” In “most” of Fielding’s “characters,” writes Miss Mulso, “the vices predominate”; and he “has a very low opinion of human nature,” which “his writings tend to enforce” on “his readers.” “Is it not the common plea of wicked men,” she concludes, “that they follow nature? whereas they have taken pains to debauch and corrupt their nature, and have by degrees reconciled it to crimes that simple, uncorrupted nature would start at.”³⁸

Miss Carter’s statement that the “fine folks” regarded *Amelia* as “very sad stuff” is borne out in the case of Lady Orrery, who pronounced the novel “tedious,” though she could not leave off reading it. *Amelia*, it seems, held her attention sufficiently to make her lose her sleep and afflict her with a

³⁷ *A Series of Letters*, II, 75-76 (April 22, 1752).

³⁸ *The Works of Mrs. Chapone*, I, 48-52 (letter X, May 27 [1752]).

"horrid head Ach." "Indeed, I belive," she writes³⁹ in a letter to Lord Orrery, January 6, 1752, "it was occasioned by reading so much of *Amelia* last night till it was very late, which I have finished, but cannot say it has given me equal pleasure with *Tom Jones* or *Joseph Andrews*. it certainly is his own history, the Love part foolishly fond *beneath the dignity of a man*. *Amelia* vastly good, but a little silly. I think she is dead many years in reality. the Prison and Baliff Sceans very well. the Catastrophy of recovering their fortune unnatural. *Amelia's* conduct in carrying her Children to *my Lord* foolish and indiscreet. Mrs. Atkison's character neither uniform nor natural, the only good stroke in it making so learned a lady also a drunken Lady. Miss Mathews the most consistant character in the book. however, his observations on the abuse of laws, and his moral discourses are very well. but all together it is tedious."

Another of the "fine folks" was Fielding's own cousin. When Lady Mary, still abroad, read *Amelia*, in 1755, she also went so far as to identify Booth as Fielding himself; wondered her cousin did not "perceive" that Tom Jones and Mr. Booth were both "sorry scoundrels"; and declared that "All these [*sic*] sort of books have the same fault, which I cannot easily pardon, being very mischievous." "They place a merit," she continues, "in extravagant passions, and encourage young people to hope for impossible events, to draw them out of the misery they chose [*sic*] to plunge themselves into, expecting legacies from unknown relations, and generous benefactors to distressed virtue, as much out of nature as fairy treasures."⁴⁰

Lady Mary's attitude toward Fielding will be discussed at length farther on. It is evident that she held *Amelia* in no very high esteem; and it is safe to say that Miss Carter was right when she complained of the low opinion which the "fine folks" entertained of the "poor unfortunate" book. Richardson's characterization of the novel as "wretchedly low and

³⁹ *The Orrery Papers*, II, 285-286 (January 6, 1752). The letter is given with her ladyship's own spelling, etc.

⁴⁰ *Letters and Works*, London, n.d. [1861], II, 279-280.

dirty" expressed not merely the view of his sentimental adherents but of a reading public in general that had not yet become accustomed to a frank and sober realism. As we have seen, the laugh had been turned against Fielding; and the reputation of his pure and womanly *Amelia* had been so completely destroyed that even the mention of her name provoked a smile. Time has substantiated Johnson's assertion that the sale of the book was injured by the "vile broken nose, never cured" of its heroine; the revised edition, which Fielding carefully prepared,⁴¹ did not appear during his lifetime, in fact, not until Arthur Murphy issued the collected *Works* in 1762. When Fielding died, in 1754, it was not *Amelia* but *Joseph Andrews* that challenged honors with *Tom Jones*.

As the roll of the "judicious" is called for the third time, the advocates of *Amelia* are found to be "few" indeed, far fewer than in the case of *Tom Jones* or even of *Joseph Andrews*. The book had gone down to defeat—not entirely, to be sure, because of *Amelia*'s "vile broken nose," but because of the distaste of the public for the author's studies in real life. *Amelia* was Fielding's last novel; with the exception of the autobiographical *Voyage to Lisbon* he did nothing more in the way of narrative. Not only his disinclination but his arduous labors as a magistrate and his rapid decline in health during the last two years of his life prevented any further venture into the world of pure fiction. His reputation as a novelist, though considerably shaken by the public ridicule of *Amelia*, was undeniably very great; but he had not succeeded in dethroning Richardson, nor had he won that position as a writer which we accord him to-day. Not yet in the opinion of scholars (Joseph Warton, for example) did he deserve mention with Cervantes and Le Sage.

⁴¹ Cross's *Fielding*, II, 356.

CHAPTER IV

A Journal of the Voyage to Lisbon

1753-1754

I

DURING the brief interim between the publication of *Amelia* (December, 1751) and Fielding's death (October, 1754), contemporary pamphleteers, journalists, and scribblers of prose narrative sought, as before, to attract the attention of the public by references to his works, by parodies of his style, and by imitations of the more obvious features of the *genre* of fiction he had created. After his enemies had celebrated the decease of his *Covent-Garden Journal* with mock obituaries, their activities were less noticeable; for, since he did not again enter the lists with newspaper or novel, occasions for assailing him were reduced in number. As the result of his battle with the denizens of Grub Street considerable "mud," to use the novelist's own expression, clung to his reputation; but even the ridicule heaped upon *Amelia* did not rob him of his standing as the author of *Tom Jones* and of *Joseph Andrews*. He was the only rival Richardson had to fear, and allusions to him and his works possessed, as every hack-writer well knew, a market value. When G. A. Stevens, for example, inserted the following parody in his *Dedication to Distress upon Distress; or, Tragedy in True Taste*: "Come ye Sons of sterling Humour, *Lucian, Rablais [sic], Cervantes*, . . . Teach me to . . .,"¹ he could count on a smile of recognition on the part of his readers.

With the writers of fiction, of course, an imitation of the external characteristics of a Fielding novel went on as usual, though very often the indebtedness was unacknowledged. An instance in point is William Guthrie's *The Friends* (1754), in which, though Fielding's influence is obvious, the author im-

¹ Dedication, pp. iv-v, May 1, 1752.

prudently declares that for "a History of the kind" here presented—the "*Epic* in lower life"—"no certain Rules" have as yet "been laid down."² Guthrie, it will be remembered, was one of the principal contributors to *Old England*. More generous in his acknowledgments is Shebbeare, who, in his first novel, *The Marriage Act* (1754), speaks of Fielding as an author "we adore" (I, 288). His admiration is most apparent; for he includes, in chapter xix, a "Dissertation" on the word "Good" (I, 111); introduces to us "a Clergyman, named *Farley*," who was "an excellent *Greek* and *Latin* Scholar" (ch. xxxii; I, 200); and bursts forth in such mock heroics as the following: "And now the Sun rose thro' the Eastern Skies, darting his Beams along the ruddy Horizon, and drank the delicious Dewdrops of the fragrant Morn; when *Farley* waked by the Side of his lovely *Nanny*" (ch. xxxviii; I, 260-261).³

Among the periodicals most friendly to Fielding, was young Arthur Murphy's *Gray's-Inn Journal* (fashioned after the pattern of *The Covent-Garden Journal*), which began in the fall of 1751. In No. 16, February 3, 1752, Murphy declares that "*Fielding* will ever be a faithful Guide to the Adventurer in comic Romance."⁴ In No. 20, March 3, 1752, he brackets the names of Fielding and Hogarth.⁵ In No. 38, July 7, 1753, he writes, "It would be absurd in any Critic, to call the inimitable Mr. *Fielding* an HUMOURIST, but he who would pronounce him to be a Man of Exquisite Humour, would, I believe, express something more pertinent to the Point."⁶ In No. 86, June 8, 1754, occurs this passage: "Whenever *Fielding* shall arrive to his Estate in this Part of *Parnassus* [*i.e.*, the "Regions of *Humour* and *Ridicule*"]," there is "a Borough

² *The Friends. A Sentimental History*, London, 1754, Preface.

³ *The Marriage Act. A Novel Containing a Series of Interesting Adventures*, London, 1754 (*Gentleman's Magazine*, XXIV, 486).

⁴ *The Gray's-Inn Journal* (reprinted in two volumes), London, 1756, I, 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 131.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 243.

ready to elect him.”⁷ In Nos. 96 and 97, August 17 and 24, 1754, Murphy criticizes Fielding’s statement that the source of the ridiculous is affectation, saying that the ridiculous may be found “where there is no Affectation at the Bottom,”⁸ and instancing certain situations in the life of Parson Adams. Thus Murphy, who was afterwards in his *Essay* to do Fielding the greatest possible disservice by exploiting himself at the expense of a friend, here finds it to his advantage to refer very often to the popular novelist. A generation later, however, when *The Gray’s-Inn Journal* was revised for inclusion in Murphy’s *Works* (1786), it was no longer Fielding but Cervantes who would “ever be a faithful guide to the adventurer in comic romance.”⁹ The fact has not been generally observed, I believe, that the servile biographer of Fielding, who, in his life of that gentleman, fawned upon such lords of life as Hurd and Warburton, conferred in his *Gray’s-Inn Journal* a higher honor upon Richardson than upon the author whose periodical he took for a model. In the course of an extensive and handsome notice (two folio pages in length) concerning the theft of “Grandison,” Apollo himself, in a special communication, declares that “RICHARDSON” is “our favourite Son . . . to whom we have imparted a large Portion of our ethereal Fire, and to whom we have opened the Secrets of the human Heart.”¹⁰

While Apollo’s “favourite Son” engaged the attention and enjoyed the praise of a great number of those eminent in the higher walks of life, Fielding was obliged to fight a hard battle for every sprig of the laurel that was conferred upon him by his more important contemporaries. Very few indeed

⁷ *The Gray’s-Inn Journal*, 2 vols., London, 1756, II, 215, 216.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 278, 284. References differ according to the editions. In the folio edition these passages are in No. 49 (August 31) and No. 50 (September 6).—*The Gray’s-Inn Journal*. By Charles Ranger, Esq; London, n.d., pp. 292, 296.

⁹ *The Works of Arthur Murphy*, London, 1786, V, 129. (Number 16 of the two-volume reprint here becomes January 27, 1752).

¹⁰ *The Gray’s-Inn Journal*. By Charles Ranger, Esq; folio edition, London, n.d., p. 17.

are the tributes of this character; but the following passages, written by three writers long since in oblivion, though well enough known in their own day, deserve mention at this point: Allan Ramsay, the painter; William Whitehead, the future laureate; and Dr. John Armstrong. In Ramsay's opinion *Tom Jones* is an "artful story . . . where the incidents are so various, and yet so consistent with themselves, and with nature, that the more the reader is acquainted with nature, the more he is deceived into a belief of its being true; and is with difficulty recall'd from that belief by the author's confession from time to time of its being all a fiction."¹¹ This reference occurs in a pamphlet (1753) on Elizabeth Canning, in which Ramsay took the opposite side from that of Fielding; but his admiration for the author as a novelist is sufficiently obvious; in *An Essay on Ridicule*, published the same year, Ramsay refers his readers for examples of the various kinds of ridicule to "*Parson Adams*, and other characters in those instructing novels written by Mr. *FIELDING*."¹²

William Whitehead, too, was very friendly. In a denunciation in *The World* of the "present race of romance writers," May 10, 1753,¹³ Whitehead asks Mr. Fitz-Adam to "forbid" his readers "even to attempt to open any novel, or romance unless it should happen to be stamped RICHARDSON or FIELDING." Very few of the authors of "the more familiar and more comical adventures," he justly observes, have "as yet found out their master's [Fielding's] peculiar art, of writing upon low subjects without writing in a low manner."¹⁴ In 1762 (he was then poet laureate) Whitehead declared,

'Tis our own fault if *Fielding's* lash we feel
Or, like French wits, begin with the Bastile.¹⁵

¹¹ *A Letter . . . concerning the Affair of Elizabeth Canning*, London, 1753, pp. 16-17.

¹² *An Essay on Ridicule*, London, 1753, p. 78 note.

¹³ Chalmers's *British Essayists*, XXVI, 103. *The World*, No. 19, May 10, 1753. According to Chalmers the article was by William Whitehead.

¹⁴ Whitehead, William, *Plays and Poems*, London, 1774, II, 315, 313. This essay is in Chalmers's *British Essayists*, XXVI, 102-103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 296.

Finally, hidden away in Dr. John Armstrong's poem called *Taste . . . an Epistle to a Young Critic* (1753), is an allusion to the popularity of Fielding's hero. By the side of the robust Tom Jones, Armstrong, though a friend of Smollett's, places the typical effeminate young "connoisseur," addressing the latter in these lines:

. . . a wou'd-be Rake, a fluttering Fool,
Who swears he loves the Sex with all his soul.
Alas, vain Youth! dost thou admire sweet *Jones*?
Thou be gallant without or Blood or Bones!¹⁶

Over in France, according to a contemporary authority, the number of effeminate young gentlemen was even greater than in England. An interesting letter, dated August 1, 1753, is to be found in the *Correspondance Littéraire* of Grimm, who, now well disposed toward Fielding, is curious to know why the kind of "domestic novel" exemplified by *Amelia*, is "tout à fait inconnue aux Français." The fault rests, he says, not upon the authors but upon their "originaux"; for when "on peint nos petits-mâîtres et nos petites-mâîtresses, on a à peu près épuisé la matière. . . . Tels sont les ouvrages de M. Crébillon fils." Fielding, whom Grimm characterizes as "un excellent auteur" "dans ce genre" (*i.e.*, the "roman domestique"), and who "méritera sans doute une place distinguée parmi les auteurs qui ont illustré l'Angleterre, est très-original, grand peintre, toujours vrai, et quelquefois aussi sublime que Molière. Son *Tom Jones, ou l'Enfant trouvé* . . . et surtout son *Joseph Andrews* et le *Ministre Abraham Adams*, sont des ouvrages excellents dans leur genre, pleins de traits de génie."¹⁷ In another interesting letter (June, 1762), Grimm says a word about Mme. Riccoboni's translation (or rather adaptation) of *Amelia*, only "la première partie" of which has as yet appeared. "Il faut attendre le reste," he writes, "pour savoir quel sort ce roman aura en France: Mme. Riccoboni l'a beaucoup changé, beaucoup raccourci. Vous savez par ses propres

¹⁶ *Taste . . . an Epistle to a Young Critic*, London, 1753, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Correspondance Littéraire*, Paris, 1877, II, 267.

ouvrages combien son style est léger, vif et agréable. Il y a dans l'original de M. Fielding des longueurs et des mauvaises choses, mais il y en a aussi de bien belles."¹⁸ Thus in spite of the "mauvaises choses," Grimm speaks well of Fielding, whom he elsewhere calls a "célèbre écrivain,"¹⁹ and for whose "roman domestique" he has a high regard.

Whitehead clearly saw the difference between Fielding, who could treat of "low subjects without writing in a low manner," and the host of novelwrights who had neither the same ability nor the same inclination. By an age that was too prone to judge according to the standards of elegance, however, Fielding's real purpose was often entirely missed even by those who were not inimical to him; and his political and personal assailants were shrewd enough to take advantage of the temper of the times and accuse him of the very "lowness" he sought to extirpate. A good example of this procedure is to be found in the pamphlet entitled *Admonitions from the Dead in Epistles to the Living* (1754). Letter XVI of this production is devoted to a verbose "admonition" addressed "to the Author of TOM JONES" by the arbiter of elegance, Joseph Addison, who, accusing the novelist of ill-nature and malignity toward his fellow craftsmen, compares him to a "Dog," that "having Power to tear the Wolf, worried the Sheep." "Wit, the most dangerous Weapon in the Hands of an ill-natur'd or ill Man . . . you possess, or have possessed in a Degree superior to all your Contemporaries"; you "are allowed to be, in your Way, the first Writer of your Age and Nation." But since "anything that has the Face of Morality" seems "to have fallen in your Way by Chance, rather than to have been an original Part of the Design," for "the future," direct your "Artillery against Vice."²⁰

This shaft was, to be sure, from the camp of the opposition; but, even by those who had no animus against him, Fielding

¹⁸ *Correspondance Littéraire*, V, 99.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 273.

²⁰ *Admonitions from the Dead in Epistles to the Living*, London, 1754, letter XVI, pp. 219, 217.

was so frequently misinterpreted that in their joint production, *The Cry* (1754), his sister Sarah and Jane Collier included several paragraphs in his defense:

"Nor less understood [than the author himself] is the character of parson *Adams* in *Joseph Andrews* by those persons, who, fixing their thoughts on the hounds trailing the bacon in his pocket (with some oddnesses in his behaviour, and peculiarities in his dress) think proper to overlook the noble simplicity of his mind, with the other innumerable beauties in his character; which, to those who can understand *the word to the wise*, are placed in the most conspicuous view.

"That the ridiculers of parson *Adams* are designed to be the proper objects of ridicule (and not that innocent man himself) is a truth which the author hath in many places set in the most glaring light. And lest his meaning should be perversely misunderstood, he hath fully displayed his own sentiments on that head, by writing a whole scene, in which such laughs are properly treated, and their characters truly depicted."²¹ In her own book, *The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, which appeared during the previous year (1753), Jane Collier shows her appreciation not only of *Tom Jones* but of *Jonathan Wild*, and speaks of Fielding himself as "a good ethical Writer."²²

But these, of course, are voices from the novelist's own household. Fielding's reputation as a "wit" and his influence upon certain external features of novel-writing were already so great as to be matters of common talk; yet at that time, not only in the popular mind, but in the opinion of the "judicious," it was not he but Richardson who was regarded as the "ethical" writer. Pamphleteers might jibe, occasionally, at the long-windedness of *Clarissa*—even Miss Carter admitted the fault—but this "Son of Apollo" was indubitably acquiring among the "best judges" a solid reputation as a profound moralist.

²¹ *The Cry*, London, 1754, III, 122-123. The "scene" is in *Joseph Andrews*, III, Chapter vii.

²² *An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, London, 1753, pp. 88, 139, 229.

With Fielding the case was very different. That his sister Sarah should find it necessary to defend the innocuous Parson Adams against a complete misunderstanding of the *raison d'être* of that character is a fact of prime significance. And, as we look back, at this point, over the constant abuse that, from various causes, had been heaped upon each one of his novels, we have less difficulty in understanding the peculiar situation.

While Richardson was exulting over the indignities to which *Amelia* was being subjected, he was elaborating with great care and enthusiasm a production which he and his adherents firmly believed would put the works of his hated rival in a total eclipse. Sir Charles Grandison, the "good man" for whose speedy advent Mrs. Donnellan and other Richardsonians had been so importunate, was to be, as the embodiment of every private and public virtue, a glorious rebuke to the profligate Tom Jones. Always lavish in distributing gift copies, Richardson neglected no opportunity this time, as we see from letters of acknowledgment which he received. One can imagine the anxiety with which, after Sir Charles had made his stately bow to the public (in 1753), the little printer awaited the result. To make a long story short, Sir Charles, eminently successful, in spite of a critic here and there, enjoyed a triumphal progress both at home and abroad. Among the congratulatory missives which came pouring in was one from my Lord Orrery (November 9, 1753): "I yesterday received your most valuable present [*i.e.*, *Grandison*] . . . we thank you for sleepless nights and sore eyes, and perhaps, there are aching hearts and salt tears still in reserve for us."²³ When the heartache and salt tears had sufficiently abated to permit of it, good Richardsonians gave themselves over to rejoicing; surely at the approach of *Grandison* all lesser heroes would beat a precipitate retreat.

The most triumphant expression in metrical form apropos of Richardson's success emanated from the abode of Samuel Johnson. In the January number of *The Gentleman's Maga-*

²³ *The Correspondence of Richardson*, I, 171.

zine,²⁴ there was addressed to "Mr. Richardson, on his *History of Sir Charles Grandison*" a turgid verse eulogy nearly a page in length, signed by "Anna Williams"; *i.e.*, to quote Mrs. Barbauld, the "blind lady, whom Dr. Johnson took to live with him."²⁵ In the course of this laudation we come upon the following paraphrase of Johnson's famous *dictum* regarding the service which Richardson had performed:

'Twas thine, a juster lesson to impart,
To move the passions, and to mend the heart.

At the close of her panegyric, the blind prophetess, looking confidently into the future, makes the oracular statement that

In distant times, when *Jones* and *Booth* are lost,
Britannia her *Clarissa's* name shall Boast.

Grandison and his creator, to be sure, did not go entirely unscathed. The author of *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa, and Pamela* (1754), for example, compared Richardson's works in some particulars unfavorably with those of his rival. Setting Grandison over against Allworthy, the writer endeavors to show that Fielding has made his "good man" more natural and much more deserving of praise. "Mr. Fielding," he says, has "with admirable judgment denied him an university education, [and] made him a great lover of retirement, seldom absent from his country seat." Grandison's "benevolence," in the critic's opinion, "has something showy and ostentatious in it; nothing in short of that graceful and beautiful nature which appears in Fielding's Allworthy." "To conclude," writes the author, addressing Richardson, "I think your writings have corrupted our language and our taste; that the composition of them all, except *Clarissa*, is bad; and that they all, particularly that [*i.e.*, *Clarissa*], have a manifest tendency to corrupt morals." The characters of all the *dramatis personae*, "except *Clarissa's*," are "faulty, ridicu-

²⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXIV, 40 (January, 1754).

²⁵ *The Correspondence of Richardson*, III, 79 note (letter dated March 1, 1754).

lous, or unmeaning." Grandison is "an inconsistent angel"; Lovelace, "an absolute devil"; Pamela is "a little pert minx, whom any man of common sense or address might have had on his own terms in a week or a fortnight"; and Pamela's seducer is a "perfect ass," who richly merits the "surname of Booby" which Fielding "very properly"²⁶ gave him.

But the view just presented of Richardson and his "good man," though not infrequent, was certainly not the prevailing one. In general, the formal world of the Mid-Eighteenth Century did not see Grandison as we see him now, or as Fielding undoubtedly saw him then. Young Gibbon, in a letter to Mrs. Porten, specially commends the book; to his mind it is a much greater novel than *Clarissa*.²⁷ Even Chesterfield, who in a well-known letter says that Richardson "mistakes the modes" of high life, is warm in his praise of the author's "great knowledge and skill both in painting and in interesting the heart." Lady Luxborough wrote Shenstone: "I think I must read *Sir C. Grandison* in my own defence; for I hear of him till I am tired. Let us read him here together."²⁸ And Shenstone himself was of the opinion that for creating *Grandison* (despite its length) Richardson deserved a bishopric. Nor is it out of place to remark here that Goethe, some time later (1768), severely takes to task (in an epistle to Frederika Oeser) those readers who will not submit

To be Sir Charles' devoted slave;
And, blindlings still, will not admit
All the Dictator's teachings brave.²⁹

Whether or not Richardson "mistook the modes," his elegant

²⁶ *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa, and Pamela*, London, 1754, pp. 18-19, 20, 57-58, 21.

²⁷ *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon*, London, new ed., 1814, II, 36 (letter to Mrs. Porten, 1756).

²⁸ Lady Luxborough's *Letters . . . to . . . Shenstone*, London, 1775, p. 369 (letter CIII, December 21, 1753).

²⁹ Grimm's *Life . . . of Goethe*, translated by S. H. Adams, Boston, 1880, p. 152.

Grandison succeeded in flattering and pleasing the elegant and complacent Mid-Eighteenth Century.

In order to end this section with a tribute to Fielding comparable to those recorded of Richardson, we must leave the illustrious little sentimentalist and his friends and search the pages of anonymous admirers. Thus in the ironic "LETTER IV" relating to the Earl of Orrery's *Remarks on Swift*, the author of *Tom Jones* is characterized as "a Master of Humour," the "most celebrated" writer of romance since the "Days of old Cervantes."³⁰ In the course of a satiric comparison between the character—as Orrery represented it—of Jonathan Swift and that of Jonathan Wild, as delineated by Fielding, the writer also pays a tribute to the novelist as a Master of "Irony"—whose style, apparently, he is endeavoring to emulate.

II

The *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* begins June 26, 1754; on October 8, Fielding died, and the *Journal* appeared posthumously, in two forms: one version, the "mutilated" one, in the month of February, 1755; the other, the inedited text, at the end of the same year. During 1754 the precarious state of Justice Fielding's health had not escaped public notice; he was known to be engaged in writing a counterblast to Lord Bolingbroke's attack upon the Christian religion, and this enterprise was the occasion of favorable comment. "It must always be remembered to the honour of Mr. Fielding," ran a paragraph in *The Evening Advertiser*, that, "while he is sinking under a complicated load of dangerous disorders, and is so near the verge of eternity, that at night there is but little probability of his surviving to the next day; he devotes the whole strength of his faculties to the honour of God, and the virtue and happiness of the human soul, in detecting the pernicious errors of the late Lord Bolingbroke; who, as long as his memory shall be transmitted to posterity, must be considered as the disgrace

³⁰ [Letter III and] Letter IV. *Relating to the Memoirs of . . . Dr. Swift*, Dublin, 1753, p. 100.

of his country, and the enemy of mankind. That Mr. Fielding's efforts, if the exertion of them is permitted to continue, will be attended with general success, there is great reason to expect."⁸¹ This projected treatise in defense of Christianity was cut short by the author's death; but the part of it actually completed was published with *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*. Now that Fielding's career was over, the appearance of the account of his last journey offered an excellent opportunity to the magazines for a review of his achievements in many fields. Particularly might we expect to find extended notices of his work as a novelist; for, while his efficiency as a magistrate had wrung recognition even from unfriendly quarters, his circle of influence in this capacity had been confined to the city of London; as a novelist, on the other hand, he spoke to a large audience at home and abroad. Strange as it may seem, however, the *Voyage to Lisbon*, in spite of the excellent opportunity for eulogy which it offered, drew from the three chief magazines only a brief sentence or two concerning the author and hardly any real praise of the work itself. It was not that the writers were ill-disposed (this time *The Gentleman's Magazine* was even more complimentary than the rest); they were simply unenthusiastic.

The apologetic account in *The London Magazine* (January, 1755) runs as follows: *The Voyage to Lisbon* "is far from doing discredit" to Fielding's memory; it "contains many Circumstances that must give it an extraordinary Relish to Persons of Benevolence and Humanity; and is such a Specimen of the Strength even of its expiring Genius, that our Readers will excuse our giving them an Extract from it."⁸² Then comes (in March, 1755) a notice in *The Monthly Review*: "This narrative, tho' not greatly abounding with incidents, we have perused with some pleasure. The reflections interspersed in it, are worthy of a writer, than whom few, if any, have been more justly celebrated for a thorough insight

⁸¹ *The Evening Advertiser*, April 16-18, 1754.

⁸² *The London Magazine*, January, 1755, pp. 54-56.

into human nature; tho', as the editor remarks, 'it must be acknowledged, that a lamp almost burnt out, does not give so steady and uniform a light, as when it blazes in its full vigour; but yet it is well known, that by its wavering, as if struggling against its own dissolution, it sometimes darts a ray as bright as ever.' " Of Fielding's unfinished essay on Lord Bolingbroke, the reviewer says, "the author shews himself in a new and advantageous light."³³ During the same month, *The Gentleman's Magazine* gives an excerpt from the *Voyage*, in which Fielding speaks of the importance of England's fisheries.³⁴ Mention is made of his "humour"—in which he is confessed to have "excelled every other writer of his age"—and of his valuable "instruction" in regard to certain public "inconveniencies." There is also a word concerning the "fragment of an answer to *Bolingbroke*," which "every man who has a taste for wit, and a love of truth" will wish "longer."³⁵ But from reading the article no one could guess that so great a man as Fielding had passed away.

For the apologetic tone of the three brief notices the reviewers probably received their cue from the unnecessarily humble appeal in the "Dedication" (a phrase or two, as quoted by *The Monthly Review*, has already been given) which appeared as an introduction to this first or "edited" version. Here is more of the same sort: "If in this little work there should appear any traces of a weaken'd and decay'd life, let your own imaginations place before your eyes a true picture, in that of a hand trembling in almost its latest hour, of a body emaciated with pains, yet struggling for your entertainment; and let this affecting picture open each tender heart, and call forth a melting tear, to blot out whatever failings may be found in a work begun in pain, and finished almost at the same period with

³³ *The Monthly Review*, XII, 234, 235.

³⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXV, 129 (in an "Account of Books omitted in February").

³⁵ Some time later, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXVI, 22 (January, 1756), speaks of the "important truths" regarding English fisheries "advanced by Mr Fielding in his *Voyage to Lisbon*."

life.”³⁶ Who could present this last work of the distinguished writer and magistrate “to the Public” in such a manner—so lachrymose, vulgar, patronizing—as though he were pleading for a culprit at the bar of justice? Was it, as has been shrewdly surmised, the author’s supposed friend Arthur Murphy, who was, seven years later, to expand the apology into a blackguardly life³⁷ of the novelist?

Whoever wrote the “Dedication” did Fielding a disservice; for its tone of condescension was reflected and reverberated by the influential magazines which supplied the book-news to literary London. Still, one ought not to make too much of the incident; the obvious fact is that Fielding’s contemporaries did not perceive in the *Voyage* those qualities which have since endeared it to many lovers of literature, from Charles Lamb³⁸ and Southey to writers of our own day. Even those, like Lady Mary, who passed as the author’s admirers saw little commendable in the *Journal*.

In view of the fact that Lady Mary’s attitude toward Fielding has been so often misinterpreted, what she says of her cousin should now be given more at length. After reading *Amelia*, her ladyship, still at Lovere, wrote to her daughter, the Countess of Bute, in England: “I wonder he [Fielding] does not perceive Tom Jones and Mr. Booth are sorry scoundrels.” In the same paragraph, she asserts that “H. Fielding has given a true picture of himself and his first wife, in the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Booth, some compliments to his own figure excepted; and, I am persuaded, several of the incidents he mentions are real matters of fact.” Apparently her

³⁶ *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, London, 1755, Dedication, pp. ii-iii. This version was published February 25, 1755 (*The London Evening Post*, February 22-25, 1755); the “inedited” version was advertised in *The Whitehall Evening Post* for November 29-December 2, 1755.

³⁷ Cross’s *Fielding*, III, 88.

³⁸ Dobson, *Eighteenth Century Vignettes*, First Series, London, 1892, p. 71; and *The Correspondence of Southey with Caroline Bowles*, edited by Dowden, pp. 184, 198.

ladyship has no very exalted notion of her cousin; nor does she seem to have had a very high regard for *Amelia*.⁸⁹

Ever since Lady Louisa Stuart asserted in 1837 that her grandmother inscribed in a copy of *Tom Jones* the words "*Ne plus ultra*," writers on the novelist have assiduously disseminated that information. But surely anyone nowadays who reads Lady Mary's correspondence would little suspect from her patronizing references that she held Fielding himself in very high esteem or that she was a very warm enthusiast about his writings. Read, for instance, the following passage from the letter we are now considering: "Fielding had really a fund of true humour, and was to be pitied at his first entrance into the world, having no choice, as he said himself, but to be a hackney writer, or a hackney coachman. His genius deserved a better fate; but I cannot help blaming that continued indiscretion, to give it the softest name, that has run through his life, and I am afraid still remains." Can it be imagined that Lady Mary had any conception of the *older* Fielding,—the successful novelist, the able magistrate, the energetic reformer? As a matter of fact she left England in 1739, three years before even *Joseph Andrews* was published; nor did she return until 1761, seven years after Fielding's death. Lady Stuart takes it for granted, naturally enough, that her grandmother, Lady Mary, kept *au courant* regarding the Fieldings through her daughter, the Countess of Bute; but is there any evidence that this fine lady knew or cared much about the distressed Bow Street justice and novel scribbler?

To continue with the letter in question, Lady Mary admits that since she was born "no original has appeared excepting Congreve, and Fielding"; but what follows this excellent praise? Here are the words: "[Fielding] would, I believe, have approached nearer to his excellences, if not forced by necessity to publish without correction, and throw many productions into the world he would have thrown into the fire if meat could have been got without money, or money without

⁸⁹ *The Letters* [1861], II, 279-280 ("July" [August?] 23 [1755]).

scribbling." "Writing," in her ladyship's opinion, when "degenerated" into a trade, is one of the "most contemptible ways of getting bread"; she had no idea, apparently, of her cousin's habit of careful revision.

When Lady Mary received the news of Fielding's death she wrote ("September 22, [1755]") as follows: "I am sorry for H. Fielding's death, not only as I shall read no more of his writings, but I believe he lost more than others, as no man enjoyed life more than he did, though few had less reason to do so, the highest of his preferment being raking in the lowest sinks of vice and misery." How differently was the social reformer regarded in Lady Mary's day! Fielding's splendid exertions in ridding London of thieves and murderers were entirely ignored by his distinguished relative. "I should think it a nobler and less nauseous employment," she continues, "to be one of the staff-officers that conduct the nocturnal weddings." With her mind still reverted to the days of Fielding's early struggles—the only time when she knew anything at first hand of his career—she thus accounts for her cousin's fortitude: "His happy constitution (even when he had, with great pains, half demolished it) made him forget everything when he was before a venison pasty, or over a flask of champagne." In the *Voyage*, Fielding himself acknowledges a "cheerfulness" which, he thanks God, was always native to his disposition; but equally native to him were those qualities of resolution and perseverance the presence of which Lady Mary never suspected. Her ladyship's attitude toward Fielding's second marriage, of which she could know nothing except from hearsay, is clearly mirrored in the words: "His natural spirits gave him rapture with his cook-maid, and cheerfulness when he was fluxing in a garret."⁴⁰ In those early days, when Fielding was having such a hard struggle to make a living, did his wealthy cousin see fit to assist him?⁴¹ The answer to this question is perhaps to be found in the following passage: "There was a

⁴⁰ *The Letters*, London [1861], II, 282-283.

⁴¹ That is, further than to accept the dedication of a play.

great similitude between his character and that of Sir Richard Steele. He had the advantage both in learning and, in my opinion, genius: they both agreed in wanting money in spite of all their friends, and would have wanted it, if their hereditary lands had been as extensive as their imagination." Proof, of course, is lacking; but may there not have been a reason for this expatiation upon her cousin's improvidence?

Even granting that Lady Mary knew little of the *real* Fielding—the Fielding who shortened his life by strenuous efforts for the public good—was there nothing to be derived from the *Voyage to Lisbon* beyond the impression of an improvident native cheerfulness which might sustain a man while "fluxing in a garret"? Was there nothing in that book of fortitude, nothing of magnanimity? "The most edifying part of the Journey to Lisbon," in Lady Mary's own words, "is the history of the kitten"; and the particular reason that this episode appealed to her was because she had, "a few days before found one, in deplorable circumstances, in a neighbouring vineyard." Lady Mary, it would seem, was far more sorry for the distresses of the kitten than she ever was for those of her distinguished cousin.

It was most unfortunate for Fielding's posthumous fame that his aristocratic relative, who knew him only in the days of his early adversity and who had no conception of or taste for his splendid achievement as a magistrate, should have become, by her position in the world of letters, one of the main authorities upon whom a succession of biographers from Scott downward have in great measure relied for their portrait of Henry Fielding. "No one," wrote Sir Walter, "who can use her words [the scandalous words about Fielding's lack of thrift] would willingly employ his own"; and Thackeray prefaces the same anecdote with the phrase, "As Lady Mary prettily says," etc. Lady Stuart's tardy story about the "*Ne plus ultra*" which she saw written in *Tom Jones* has done very little to offset those racy stories of Fielding's sordid indigence with which her witty but sharp-tongued grandmother regaled a younger generation.

In characterizing her cousin's magistracy as a "nauseous employment," Lady Mary had in mind the unsavory reputation of that office in the days of the "trading justices"; that is, before Henry Fielding, by heroic efforts, endeavored to redeem it. Up to the time of his death, the old odium attaching to the post was kept so constantly in mind by the newspapers and pamphlets of his enemies that even those who took no part against him were influenced by that atmosphere of "social contempt" which still clung to a Bow Street magistrate. Ironically enough, even in October, 1754, the very month in which the great novelist was dying in Portugal, there appeared in the scurrilous *Memoirs of the Shakespear's-Head* one of the most vicious attacks upon him in his character as a police-court justice that the pestilential literature of contemporary abuse affords. Of this production, Chapter Four of Book Two is devoted to "*A Town Morning; a Justice of Peace and his Levee*," in which "Fielding" (mentioned by name) is scandalously represented in full swing as a trading justice. It is unnecessary to consider in detail this indecent lampoon; but among the more quotable passages the following parody of Fielding's mock-heroics may be given: "The Sun had now almost gain'd the Meridian, the Oeconomical Housewife was preparing Dinner for her industrious Husband; the male Votary of *Bacchus*, the female Votaries of *Venus*, and the *Card Table*, were stretching their debilitated Limbs . . . [when] The Justice now descended, to assume his Chair of State, and administer *partial Decision*." By the time the *Shakespear's-Head* was published, Fielding was beyond the reach of his "Grubbean" enemies; but they had done their work effectively, as we shall observe in succeeding chapters.

Lady Mary was not alone in failing to appreciate the *Voyage to Lisbon*; very few *dicta* concerning the work by prominent people of the day have come down to us—almost nothing, in fact, in the way of enthusiastic commendation. We know from the entries in the ledger of William Strahan, that 5000 copies (2500 of each of the two versions) of the *Voyage* were

printed;⁴² but, though the booksellers were well supplied, Fielding's last book made little stir in the world. Had it been greatly successful we may be sure that the pliant Arthur Murphy, whatever his attitude in 1755 when he wrote—if he did write—the “Dedication,” would not have thought it politic to refer in his introductory “Essay” (1762) to the brave cheerfulness of Fielding in the *Voyage* as the “jesting” of a malefactor “on the scaffold.” Some other feature of the work would have given an outlet for his Hibernian oratory.

More direct evidence concerning the reception of the *Voyage* comes from Fielding's own *ménage*. Miss Margaret Collier, who had accompanied the Fieldings to Lisbon, had returned with the widow, and may have helped the blind brother, John, with the many alterations in the manuscript which he regarded as necessary, wrote as follows (October 3, 1755) to her beloved Richardson from Ryde, whence she had gone for the winter: “I was sadly vexed, at my first coming, at a report which had prevailed here, of my being the author of Mr. Fielding's last work ‘The Voyage to Lisbon:’ the reason which was given for supposing it mine, was to the last degree mortifying, (viz that it was so very bad a performance, and fell so far short of his other works, it must needs be the person *with him* who wrote it) . . . If a man falls short of what is expected from his former genius in writing, and publishes a very dull and unentertaining piece, then ‘to be sure it was his sister, or some woman friend, who was with him.’ Alas! my good Mr. Richardson, is not this a hard case?”⁴³ Miss Collier's letter starts a number of questions: Was she *really* angry, or was she secretly pleased by the rumor regarding her authorship of the *Voyage*? Had she, as Professor Cross suggests, “magnified” the amount and character of the assistance she had rendered John Fielding in the preparation of the manuscript for the press, “and thus occasioned the rumour of which she complained?” “Perhaps she was piqued,” he continues, “because

⁴² See Mr. J. Paul de Castro's article in *The Library*, third series, VIII, 153-154 (April, 1917).

⁴³ *Correspondence of Richardson*, II, 77-78.

she was not mentioned in 'The Journal;' she was certainly angry because Fielding interfered with her flirtations in Lisbon; and above all else she was writing to a man touched to the quick by Fielding's insinuation that Mr. Richardson's novels were not conducive to the cultivation of good manners in those who read them."⁴⁴ Explain the passage as we may, the fact remains that if Fielding's *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* had achieved during the half-year and more which had elapsed since its publication a notable success Miss Collier would hardly have written in the way she did; even more abusive she might have been, but the tone and method of her attack would have been somewhat different.

We may here insert, parenthetically, the allusion (in the *Voyage*) to Richardson mentioned above: "I answer with the great man [*i.e.*, Richardson], whom I just now quoted, that my purpose is to convey instruction in the vehicle of entertainment; and so to bring about at once, like the revolution in the Rehearsal, a perfect reformation of the laws relating to our maritime affairs: an undertaking, I will not say more modest, but surely more feasible, than that of reforming a whole people, by making use of a vehicular story, to wheel in among them worse manners than their own."⁴⁵ What the author of *Tom Jones* really thought of Grandison, that "good man" who (as he may have heard from his sister Sarah) was to discredit all frivolous authors like himself, was never, so far as we know, specifically recorded. But we may venture to guess which book Fielding had in mind when he spoke of a story built for "instruction" that had wheeled in among a people "worse manners than their own." If so, it was a singularly mild statement from a writer who had witnessed the failure of his *Amelia* and the triumph of the egregious Sir Charles.

To return to the *Voyage*, among those who enjoyed, figuratively, a dance upon the author's grave was, of course, the novelist's bitter enemy, Horace Walpole. In a letter to Richard Bentley, March 27, 1755, he coarsely sneered at the book,

⁴⁴ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 96-97.

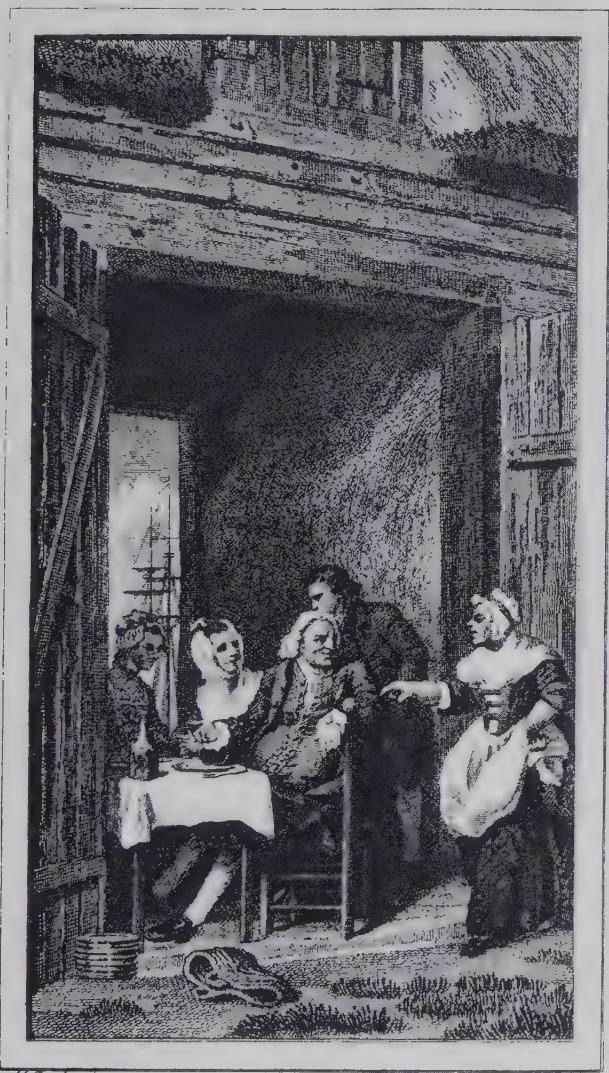
⁴⁵ Henley edition, XVI, 186.

professing to find in it merely an account of how Fielding's "dropsy" was "teased by an inn-keeper's wife in the Isle of Wight."⁴⁶ But for the acme of funebral Terpsichorean triumph we must turn to the Richardsonians. The following letter from Edwards to Richardson needs no commentary; while we read it, the print dissolves as in a motion picture and we see, standing back of the lines, the pious Richardson himself. "I have lately read over with much indignation," writes Edwards, "Fielding's last piece, called his *Voyage to Lisbon*. That a man, who had led such a life as he had [Richardson had presumably told Edwards about Fielding, just as he had told Defreval and Lady Bradshaigh.], should trifle in that manner when immediate death was before his eyes, is amazing." "From this book," continues Edwards, "I am confirmed in what his other works had fully persuaded me of, that with all his parade of pretences to virtuous and humane affections, the fellow had no heart. And so—his knell is knolled."⁴⁷

How strange that one of the bravest books in the world, a book which reveals the extraordinary tenderness and cheerfulness of an author racked by the agony of disease and standing in the very presence of death, should be thus misunderstood and maligned! The modern view of the *Journal* is so totally different that we find difficulty in understanding such an attitude. But it is just this difference between the prevalent point of view of Fielding's day and the point of view of our own day which explains much of the lack of appreciation which he encountered in regard to *all* his books. There was no lack of satire during the eighteenth century, nor of rough-and-tumble burlesque—the prose satires of Swift were commended for their wisdom, and Butler's verse satire, *Hudibras*, of the previous century, still enjoyed high favor; but in the new *genre* of prose fiction it was no doubt difficult for the formal world to accept as profound an author who depicted the homely

⁴⁶ *Letters of Horace Walpole*, edited by Toynbee, Oxford, 1913, III, 294.

⁴⁷ *Correspondence of Richardson*, III, 125 (May 28, 1755);



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scenes of common life and told truth laughingly. It was *Grandison*, not *Amelia*, that won the praise of the eminent; the *Journal* of Fielding's voyage was proffered with apology and received without applause.

CHAPTER V

Fielding's Contemporaries

IN summing up the attitude of Fielding's contemporaries toward his novels, we notice in the first place that two of his books—*Tom Jones*, at least, and eventually *Joseph Andrews*—were widely popular with the reading public. Even his enemy Cibber allowed that he was a "wit"—a "broken wit"—while among his friends he was commonly reputed to possess a greater share of wit¹ and humor than any other author of his day. Furthermore, among the writers of prose fiction his name was one to conjure with. Yet when we compare his fame with that of Richardson, we see immediately that he was thought to have worked in a lesser *genre*: he had not the same reputation for moral purpose and profundity of thought; moreover, he was not a sentimentalist, and literary England was highly sentimental. The body of contemporary criticism of his novels seems to be strangely lacking in those illustrious names which exert a great influence upon an author's reputation. Pope, Gray, Young, Walpole, Johnson, Hurd, Chesterfield, have either ill words for him or practically none. Warburton left a reference, to be sure, but all in all he was more influential in the cause of Richardson. It is not true, as some writers would have it, that Fielding met with nothing but abuse in his own age; but it is very clear that neither up to the time of his death nor for many a day to come was he regarded by those in authority as a greater novelist than his rival. It was Richardson who enjoyed the more exceptional triumph in England; and it was Richardson who had the reputation at home of having been more successful than Fielding abroad.

Had Pope vouchsafed to *Joseph Andrews* the praise which, according to Warburton, he bestowed upon *Pamela*; had John-

¹ "You will be pleased to note that Fielding is a Wit," said Edward Moore, in a scarcely gracious letter, written during the novelist's latter days. See Miss Godden's *Fielding*, pp. 214-215.

son written of Fielding in the *Rambler* what he wrote of Richardson; had Young, the popular author of *Night Thoughts*, been as indefatigable a propagandist for Fielding as for Richardson; had the popular author of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* talked of Fielding as he did of Fielding's rival; had Lady Mary chosen to put into print that "*Ne plus ultra*" which according to her granddaughter she wrote in a copy of *Tom Jones*; had Chesterfield seen fit to say as good things of Fielding, as, in spite of certain strictures, he did say of Richardson—or (let us cross the Channel for a moment) had Rousseau and Diderot and other great Frenchmen been willing to praise Fielding as handsomely as they praised Richardson (and had their eulogies been echoed with great satisfaction in England); had—but why go on? The fact is that none of these persons—whose vogue or authority was generally admitted—*did*, apparently, leave on record in any conspicuous place very much that was helpful to Henry Fielding.

On the other hand, Richardson, happy-starred, enjoyed the favor of a veritable host of influential supporters, among whom, as we have said, were the two most talked-of poets of the Mid-Century, Edward Young and Thomas Gray. A more detailed account of these writers is now in order. The Rev. Edward Young, who, as the author of *Night Thoughts*, had already achieved an international reputation, preached Richardson early and late, wherever he went, with the zeal of an apostle. His efforts to convert the Duchess of Portland—crowned eventually with ostensible success—are a matter of literary history;² his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) purported on the title-page to be in the form of a "Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison"; and of *Clarissa* he once said, "That romance will do more good than a body of divinity."³ Not only did he celebrate the novelist in verse,⁴ but he went so far as to declare that Richardson was "as great and super-eminent in *his* way, as were Shakespeare and

² Huchon, R., *Mrs Montagu and her Friends*, London, 1907, p. 23.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴ Thomson, Clara, *Samuel Richardson*, London, 1900, p. 123.

Milton in theirs.”⁵ After Richardson’s death, as Young’s curate, the Rev. John Jones, tells us, the author of *Night Thoughts* was desirous of placing in the hands of Joseph Spence, the anecdotist, “ample materials . . . relating to . . . his late friend Mr. Richardson, the poetical prose-writer.”⁶ Would that Fielding might have had as his friend so unwearied and enthusiastic an advocate! Even Lyttelton, who enjoyed no mean reputation as a writer, left in his works no tribute of his own, so far as we know, to the author of *Tom Jones*. In his *Dialogues of the Dead*, the part about Fielding and his rival was deliberately handed over to Mrs. Montagu.

A greater poet than Young was Thomas Gray, already distinguished for his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. *Faute de mieux*, this author’s lukewarm criticism of *Joseph Andrews* has become one of the famous *dicta* of all time. What did he think of the rival novelists? Of *Clarissa* he said (according to his “Intimate Friend the Reverend Norton Nicholls”) that “‘he knew no instance of a story so well told,’ and spoke with the highest commendation of the strictly dramatic propriety, and consistency of the characters, perfectly preserved, and supported from the beginning to the end, in all situations and circumstances; in every word, action, and look.” And of *Tom Jones*? “I remember,” writes Nicholls, “Mr. Gray was pleased with an opinion of Dr. Johnson, related to me by Davies the player”—the “opinion” being one of Johnson’s celebrated remarks to the effect that Fielding could tell you “what o’clock it was, but as for Richardson, he could make a clock, or a watch.”⁷

Then there was the popular Shenstone, who, as we have seen, was a Richardsonian, though a mild one. Yawning over the story of Parson Adams as “tedious,” and thinking even less

⁵ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, LIII, 924 (November, 1783).

⁶ Spence, J., *Anecdotes*, edited by Singer, London, 1820, p. 455 (letter of September 3, 1761).

⁷ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray and the Rev. Norton Nicholls*, edited by Mitford, London, 1843, p. 46.

of *Tom Jones*—despite the fact that he delayed returning Lady Luxborough's copy—this sentimental gentleman confessed his admiration for both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and made his bow to the moral *Grandison*.

Everyone knows how difficult it is to find commendatory references to Fielding in the verse of his day; yet tributes to Richardson may be gathered in abundance—from Aaron Hill's lines, in 1740, to

Sweet Pamela! for ever blooming maid!

and to her author,

Thou skill'd great moulder of the master'd heart!

to the epitaph contributed at the time of the novelist's death (1761) by the most erudite woman of that century, Miss Elizabeth Carter, who, well disposed as she was toward Fielding, never experienced any such emotion at *his* death as is indicated in the following rhapsody upon his rival:

And oft will Innocence, of aspect mild,
And white-rob'd Charity, with streaming eyes,
Frequent the cloister where their patron lies.
This, reader, learn; and learn from one whose woe
Bids her wild verse in artless accents flow: . . .
Ah, no! expect not from the chisel'd stone
The praises, graven on our hearts alone.
There shall his fame a lasting shrine acquire;
And ever shall his moving page inspire
Pure truth, fixt honour, virtue's pleasing lore;
While taste and science crown this favour'd shore.⁸

Miss Mulso, concerned for the health of her favorite author, thus apostrophizes the "relentless maid" Hygeia,

Him Virtue loves, and brightest Fame is his:
Smile thou too, Goddess, and complete his bliss.⁹

⁸ *Correspondence of Richardson*, I, ccxii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, clxxxi.

In Byrom's verses, Richardson is

. . . he, who in plain Prose
Without our Help has ventur'd to expose
Vice in its odious colours, and to paint
In his *Clarissa's* Life and Death a Saint.¹⁰

And that early feminist, John Duncombe, by his lines to Richardson in *The Femininead*, won the applause not only of the ladies of England but of the Archbishop of Canterbury himself:

To these weak strains, O thou! the sex's friend
And constant patron, RICHARDSON! attend!
Thou, who so oft with pleas'd, but anxious care,
Hast watch'd the dawning genius of the fair,
With wonted smiles wilt hear thy friend display
The various graces of the female lay;
Studious from folly's yoke their minds to free,
And aid the gen'rous cause espous'd by thee.¹¹

Think of the preachers who rallied to the support of Richardson, from the Rev. Benjamin Slocock, who commended *Pamela* from the pulpit, to the bishops and future bishops who echoed the praises of *Clarissa*. There was Mark Hildesley, Bishop of Sodor and Man, who spoke of Richardson as an author that possessed both ability and disposition to promote "virtue and religion."¹² There was Douglas, Bishop of Salisbury, who was so much affected by the bailiff scene in *Clarissa* that "he was drowned in tears, and could not trust himself with the book any longer."¹³ And finally—though it would be easy enough to extend this list—there was the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury himself, who so pleasantly mentioned *Grandison*.

¹⁰ *The Poems of John Byrom*, edited by A. W. Ward, 1894, I, i, 263 (Chetham Society Publications, XXIX).

¹¹ See *The Femininead* [*Femininead*] by John Duncombe, London, 1754, p. 6; and *Letters from . . . Dr. Thomas Herring, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, London, 1777 (letter of March 21, 1754).

¹² *Correspondence of Richardson*, V, 118 (letter of December 20, 1753).

¹³ Prior, Sir James, *Life of Edmond Malone*, London, 1860, p. 439.

Two future prelates of the Church of England, already distinguished in the world of letters, were William Warburton and his protégé, Richard Hurd—writers whom Murphy took pains to flatter in his essay on Fielding in 1762. Warburton, it is true, had inserted in his edition of Pope (1751) that excellent footnote in praise of Fielding which we have already quoted. Was it a return for the compliments in *Tom Jones* and in the *Journey to the Next World*? Or was it a dig at Richardson caused by a temporary pique? Be that as it may, this celebrated writer, whose name was writ large in that century, had always been much more active in Richardson's cause than in that of Fielding. It was he who discussed *Pamela* with Alexander Pope and sent the little printer into ecstasies by telling of the great poet's admiration for the book; it was he who supplied a preface (afterwards withdrawn) for *Clarissa*. Warburton's supercilious young friend and follower, Richard Hurd, who, as we have remarked, had met Fielding (then sinking under a complication of diseases) in 1751, turned up his nose at the "poor emaciated, worn-out rake, whose gout and infirmities have got the better even of his buffoonery."¹⁴ One may be sure that if Fielding's standing among men of letters had been at that time anything like what it eventually became, young Hurd would never have been so insolent. Very different was his attitude, even in the early days, toward the author of *Pamela*. In a letter to the Rev. John Devey, he writes, "Please tell her [Mrs. Devey] I have just read Pamela, and am glad, for the credit of my judgment, that I agree with her in admiring it. Some people have thought it odd in me, but I really like Pamela in low life better than in high. I have not room now, or I think I could give excellent reasons for my opinion . . . what pleasure could I take in talking over this . . . with Mrs. Devey and your good self."¹⁵ And though this champion of romance disparaged prose fiction in general because it was "destitute" of the "measured sounds" of verse,¹⁶

¹⁴ Kilvert, F., *Memoirs of . . . Hurd*, London, 1860, p. 45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *The Works of Richard Hurd*, London, 1811, II, 19.

he more than once confessed his admiration for the works of Richardson, whom he esteemed more highly than he did Rousseau. Objecting to one of the scenes of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, he observes (in a letter to Balguy), "If this be invention, M. Rousseau does not appear so judicious as Mr. Richardson, whose manner he imitates."¹⁷

A more famous personage than either Hurd or Warburton was the celebrated Lord Chesterfield; why has so little from him about Fielding made its way into literary history? Surely his lordship had often been in friendly touch with the novelist; and yet no estimate, on his part, of Fielding's work as a writer of fiction seems to have survived except a passage in one of his letters to the effect that his young son enjoys *Tom Jones* because he loves "a chain of stories greatly."¹⁸ Did it not occur to him that this great book was something more than a "chain of stories"? But what did he think of Richardson? Did he not say of the author of *Clarissa* that he was a writer "qui manque de savoir et de style, mais qui connoit le cœur"?¹⁹

Last and—eventually—most influential of all was Samuel Johnson, already (despite Chesterfield) a power in the world of letters, and, at no very distant period, to become its dictator. Of his opposition to Fielding and his exaltation of Richardson enough has, for the present, been said. *Clarissa*, in Johnson's opinion, was so replete with wisdom that he pressed the author to furnish that work with an *index rerum*. And none of the propagandists, female or male,—not even the Rev. Edward Young,—who exerted themselves in the cause of Richardson, ever contributed to that novelist's fame such an imperishable *dictum* as Johnson did when he declared in the Ninety-Seventh *Rambler*, February 19, 1751, that the author of *Clarissa* had "enlarged the knowledge of human nature" and had "taught the passions to move at the command of vir-

¹⁷ Kilvert, F., *Memoirs of . . . Hurd*, p. 306.

¹⁸ *Letters of . . . Chesterfield to his Godson*, edited by the Earl of Carnarvon, Oxford, 1890, p. 373 (letter of April 5, 1766).

¹⁹ Chesterfield's *Miscellaneous Works*, second ed., London, 1779, III, 365 (letter of October 13, O. S., 1750).

tue." If anyone had said in 1754, at the time of Fielding's death, that *Tom Jones* was richer in wisdom than *Clarissa*, the statement would have been regarded by the world in general as preposterous.

Thus many prominent figures of the Mid-Century pass in review before us: Walpole, who disliked Richardson as well as Fielding, is conspicuous by his absence; so, too, Lady Mary, who, conceding Richardson's power to make her weep, supports her cousin, though she cannot help telling scandalous stories about him; but Pope, Gray, Aaron Hill, Shenstone, Young, Hurd, Chesterfield, and Johnson are all of Richardson's party. From across the Channel, a distinguished foreign delegation of Richardsonians is headed by Marmontel, Rousseau, and Diderot. Then, chanting the virtues of *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison*, comes a long line of English clergymen, from curate to bishop, too numerous to particularize; and, finally, there appears Richardson's own *garde du corps*—Mrs. Donnellan, Mrs. Delany, Miss Mulso, Miss Talbot, and (for she admitted her "partiality") the "learned" Miss Carter, who, as they go, make the pathway sweet with the incense of praise. Surely in the Mid-Century no such procession could be assembled in Fielding's honor.

Nowadays even Richardsonians are compelled to admit that the positions of the two novelists have been exactly reversed. Imagine the procession of modern critics who would march proudly under Fielding's banner! It is only natural, therefore, to ask what the causes were which operated against the author during his lifetime. In the first place, there were the attacks upon Fielding himself, varied in kind and from different quarters, and due to the malice of many enemies, political, dramatic, journalistic, and personal. His political employments; his impecuniousness; his independence in marrying his "cook-maid"; his career as a dramatic censor—so bold as to be cut short by the Licensing Act; his despised position as a police court magistrate; his journalistic battles with the denizens of Grub Street; his very efforts as a reformer of corrupt social conditions—every activity, indeed, in which Fielding was ever

engaged (as well as his personal peculiarities and habits) was seized upon by his bitter assailants as a *motif* for the vilest kind of slander. Kenrick and Smollett and Bonnell Thornton; Richardson and various Richardsonians; Cibber and the Cibberites; Aretine and the Sea Porcupines and Argus of the Hundred Eyes; Orbilius and the Historiographer of the King of the Beggars; the writer of *Admonitions*; the memorialist of *The Shakespear's-Head*—not to mention a horde of other anonymous defamers—thrusting, bludgeoning, and poisoning—what a picture! Is it any wonder that the greatness of Fielding's achievement as a novelist was obscured to the view of his more eminent contemporaries? For the contrast picture, there is the serene and comfortable Richardson in his summer house, living apart from the wrangling and scurrility of political and journalistic warfare, surrounded by his "dear ladies," commended by the clergy, praised by the eminent, at home and abroad—already adored to such a degree that he had almost become a cult.

But to account for Richardson's greater vogue with those competent in literature on the score that he escaped the unjust calumny heaped upon his rival is to tell only part of the story. Reasons must be sought for in the character of the age itself. And the fact must never be lost sight of that Fielding's novels were, by the general public, very widely read and enjoyed. To begin with, his narratives were alive with incident dramatically elaborated; without caring for, without ever really understanding the purpose of *Tom Jones*, one might, like Lord Chesterfield's son, follow with great eagerness the varying fortunes of Tom and Sophia. Again, without regarding even the incidents themselves, one might still be agreeably employed; for the author's wit, humor, and irony were omnipresent. Indisputably here was a clever fellow—for the novel manufacturer, for the playwright, for the journalist, for the man-about-town, each of these prose fictions was a perfect treasure mine, from which everyone might enrich his own writings and conversation. But like other humorists, before and since, Fielding paid the penalty: it is always difficult for a

contemporary audience to realize that their "facetious master" is one of the wisest authors of the century; in that age, with its newly found predilection for sentimentalism, with its formal elegance and—despite actual license—conventionality in morals, it was well-nigh impossible.

The statement is often made that Fielding entirely expressed in his novels the ideals of the eighteenth century; and it is true he portrayed the life of his times most realistically. That was the trouble—or part of it. Thomas Gray, after perfunctorily defending such "light things" as *Joseph Andrews*, hurried on to enjoy "eternal" sentimental romances by Marivaux and Crébillon. Lady Luxborough admitted that *Tom Jones* was a glass in which the beauty herself might see her own deformities; but she failed to appreciate the utility of such a revelation. Lady Orrery read *Amelia* until she was afflicted with a "horrid headache"; yet she complained that on the whole this picture of real life was to her "tedious." Francis Coventry's fine lady, as will be remembered, objected to Mr. Fielding's novels because, forsooth, they dealt with such stuff as passed every day between her and her maid. It was not quite clear why anyone who *could* draw ideal or elegant characters should waste his time with the trivial scenes of ordinary existence. *Amelia*, the novel in which Fielding ventured farthest into the realm of the actual, was acknowledged by the writer himself to have been in the eyes of the public a failure.

And so the author of *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* did picture the life of his times—in a way no one has ever surpassed; but, for all that, it was not he but Richardson who reflected the *taste and temper* of the Mid-Century. Fielding was not a mere delineator of his age; he was a critic and a severe critic of the faults of that age. Richardson, on the other hand, did not disturb conventions; he flattered and intensified them. It has been said that the author of *Pamela* was one of the great forerunners of the democratic spirit in fiction, inasmuch as he demanded the interest of his readers in the fortunes of a servant girl; but a moment's reflection should convince anyone that it was Fielding and not Richardson who was the actual demo-

crat. By holding out against her would-be seducer, Pamela was rewarded by a higher position in the social scale; Richardson applauded her, and, so, it would seem, did the world in general. Fielding viewed the transaction through modern eyes: in his *Joseph Andrews*, he makes Pamela say of Joseph's Fanny, "She *was* my equal . . . but I am no longer Pamela Andrews; I am now this gentleman's lady, and, as such, am above her."²⁰ Any serious consideration of the thesis of *Jonathan Wild*—that greatness cannot be real greatness unless it be accompanied by goodness of heart—will establish the fact that Fielding was as sound on the question of intrinsic worth (in spite of what he may have believed about government by the "mob") as the poet who said at the end of the century, "The rank is but the guinea's stamp." Colley Cibber's charge against Fielding of trying "to knock all distinctions of mankind on the head" was frequently repeated even by those who had no personal animus against the novelist. In short, when the history of the democratic movement in fiction is written again, a very important chapter will be devoted to Henry Fielding.

Rarely in their outlook upon life have two writers been so diametrically opposed as were Richardson and Fielding. Richardson threw the accent upon conduct; Fielding, upon character. Richardson's aim, like that of most romancers, was to picture ideal persons: Pamela was only a servant girl, but the author's desire was to make her a lady; Clarissa, the virgin martyr, was exploited as a paragon; Grandison was to exhibit all the perfections of a "good man." One thing was lacking in these impeccable characters—namely, unselfishness; Pamela had a shrewd eye for worldly advancement; Clarissa dwelt morbidly upon her martyrdom and the reward which awaited her in heaven; Grandison, the embodiment of Magnificence, assumed an intolerably supercilious bearing toward his inferiors, in other words, toward the rest of mankind—to understand him fully, one should put him beside his modern representative, Sir Willoughby Patterne, remembering the while,

²⁰ *Joseph Andrews*, Book IV, ch. vii (Henley edition, I, 343).

that Richardson was actually in earnest. Fielding, the experienced and accomplished dramatist, whose main business for years had been to unmask the shams and selfish ideals of the world, saw as clearly as any man ever did that the salvation of society depends upon a just valuation of and admiration for the quality of good-heartedness. It is a difficult matter, apparently, even at the present day, to cleave to the pure in heart rather than to the fortunate; in that age of formal manners and class distinctions it must have been even more difficult. So Fielding spoke out, accenting, as is the way with satirists and reformers, the lights and shadows of his picture. In actual life, as Fielding clearly perceived, a Parson Adams would have been scorned as "low"; the author brings him unscathed through the grossest indignities and turns the laugh upon the scorners. The gentle Amelia Booth, who appeared to her contemporaries "such a fool," was pitted over against the morbid and megalomaniacal Clarissa. By an audience that desired and expected the self-centered prodigies of previous fiction Fielding's aim in presenting scenes in which intrinsic goodness was not accompanied by the glamour of elegance or of a tragic situation was only too often misinterpreted. If the author depicted taverns and jails, it must be, forsooth, because his own mind did not rise above such places; if he portrayed an honest but impecunious parson, a generous-hearted but distressed wife, it was because his mind did not reach to the heights of grandeur—the assumption was that no man who *could* write otherwise would descend so "low." When Boswell asked Johnson to concede that Fielding painted real life, the Doctor replied, "Why, sir, it is of very low life," and instanced Richardson's observation to the effect that had he not known Fielding's lineage he would have imagined him to be "an ostler." This conception of Fielding's achievement was not confined to the Richardsonians; it was the view of the age itself, and it colored and distorted criticism for a long time to come. Poets might sentimentalize upon the short and simple annals of the poor, but they must not show them in their habit as they lived; elegant divines might orate upon charitableness and true Chris-

tianity, but they must not describe a meeting at the pig-sty between Parson Adams and Parson Trulliber.

The philosophy of life which Fielding expanded and clothed in flesh and blood in his novels appears more pithily in that scene in the *Journey from this World to the Next* in which Minos sits in judgment upon the souls who throng the entrance to Elysium. Among others is a grave-faced, sanctimonious spirit (of the Richardson type). He asserts that he has "constantly frequented his church" and "been a rigid observer of fast-days"; that he has never once been guilty of any "excess"; and that "vice in others" has "never escaped his severest censure"; moreover, that he has "disinherited his son for getting a bastard"—"Have you so," said Minos, "then pray return . . . and beget another; for such an unnatural rascal shall never pass this gate." Shortly after comes "a very genteel" spirit (of the Walpole type). He makes "a very low bow" to Minos, imitates "the motion of taking snuff with his right hand," and hopes that he has "in his life deserved the character of a perfect fine gentlemen." Minos replies that "it would be a great pity to rob the world of so fine a gentleman" and desires him "to take the other trip." Finally, comes a rich parson (of the formal-clergy type), "stepping forwards with a stately gait" and pushing aside the spirits of some poor parishioners who have died from his neglect. "Not so fast, doctor," cries Minos, drawing him back, "for no man enters that gate without charity."²¹ Here we have the gist of Fielding's philosophy, which was also that of the Saint Paul whom he so much admired.²² Only through works, he thinks, can faith be adequately expressed, and the *summum bonum* is not reserved to the rich, or the great, or the lip-worshippers; all those who are pure in heart may attain it; it is so simple that it can be expressed in a single word: Charity—Brotherly Love. No novelist has ever surpassed Fielding in illustrating this noble rule of life; yet to many of the aristocracy of the day he was only

²¹ Chapter VII of the *Journey*; see Henley edition, II, 240-245.

²² "This is the most golden of all Rules."—*The Covent-Garden Journal*, No. 55 (July 18, 1752), Jensen edition, II, 63.

a "low fellow"; by the pompous clergy, he was often regarded as a buffoon; and in the minds of many otherwise worthy persons he was merely the "facetious" author of the dissolute *Tom Jones*.

One reason—probably the main one—that Fielding, in spite of his wide popularity, was not better appreciated in 1754 by those whose authority would have been valuable to his fame, was that, in his desire to face the facts of life and to champion the rights of man, he was far in advance of the tendencies of his own genteel and formal age. To paraphrase a *dictum* of Warton's at the end of the century, little did Fielding's contemporaries imagine that he would one day be remembered as a supreme genius when Hurd and Warburton had become mere names.

CHAPTER VI

Before Murphy's Essay

1754-1762

DURING the interval of eight years which elapsed between the death of Fielding (1754) and the publication of the collected edition of his works (1762), the writing of prose narratives was so popular that Colman the Elder made it the theme of his satirical comedy, *Polly Honeycombe, a Dramatick Novel*, which appeared at the Theatre Royal, December 5, 1760. To the printed copy of the play was appended a long list of current fiction, taken "from the catalogue of one of our most popular circulating libraries," in order that even readers with no "great degree of shrewdness" might realize the timeliness and justice of the author's attack. In the play itself, Polly judges her admirers according to various characters in her beloved novels. She declares her hatred of Ledger, who is "as deceitful as Blifil, as rude as the Harlowes, and as ugly as Doctor Slop," and will have her adored Scribble, "though we go through as many distresses as Booth and Amelia." "Who knows," she asks, "but he may be a foundling, and a gentleman's son, as well as Tom Jones?"¹

Despite Colman's satire, however, prose fiction was now so much in demand that the new magazines, the *Monthly* and the *Critical*, made a regular business of reviewing novels; and in their articles Richardson and Fielding were used side by side as touchstones of the novelist's art. Of the heroine of *Amanda* (1758), the *Monthly* reviewer said: "She must not think herself qualified to keep company with Madam Clarissa, or Miss Western: ladies of the first distinction in the records of romance." Smollett, also, was very popular, and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) was already the sensation of the

¹ Colman's *Dramatick Works*, London, 1777, IV, 54, 53. In this edition the list of novels occupies seven pages.

day; but neither Smollett nor Sterne was able to dislodge either Richardson or Fielding from his established position.

Among the fiction manufacturers, Fielding's name continued to be held in high esteem; and though not a single professed imitation of his work before Cumberland's *Henry* in 1795 is now at all generally known, many would-be novelists, long since forgotten, did their best to walk in the trail which he had blazed. Among those features of the "new species of writing" imitated by Fielding's lesser followers were: the attempt to present real life, especially the life of ordinary people; the humorous presentation of characters and events, particularly the sprinkling-in of the mock-heroic; and, above all, the introduction of the author's own commentary, either in prolegomenous chapters or in diffused reflections. We have already seen examples of his influence, particularly of his initial essays. A *Monthly* reviewer once complained, indeed, that Mrs. Haywood's *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) was lacking in "those entertaining introductory chapters, and digressive essays, which distinguish the works of a *Fielding*, a *Smollet*, or the author of *Pompey* the little, and which so agreeably relieve us from that over-stretch and languor of attention, which a continued string of meer narration commonly produces."² With this criticism in mind, Mrs. Haywood took pains to say in a subsequent novel, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753), that her book contained "none of those beautiful digressions, those remarks, or reflections which a certain would-be critic pretends are so much distinguish'd in the writings of his two favourite authors." Possibly Charlotte Lennox³ was

² *The Monthly Review*, V, 394 (October, 1751).

³ *The Female Quixote* of this "shamefully distress'd author," who was befriended by Richardson and praised by Johnson, was handsomely reviewed in Fielding's *Covent-Garden Journal* (March 24, 1751, Jensen edition, I, 279-282). Mrs. Haywood's *Betsy Thoughtless*, on the other hand (in which Fielding's Little Theatre was characterized as a "scandal-shop"), having been tried before the Censorial Court on the "Statute of Dulness," was acquitted of the charge when it was shown that as a citizen of Grub Street she could be as "dull" as she pleased (February 22, 1752, Jensen edition, I, 229-231).

thinking of Mrs. Haywood's attack on Fielding when she made her salacious landlady⁴ in *Henrietta* endeavor to discourage the heroine from reading *Joseph Andrews* by recommending the far more entrancing works—"the finest love-sick, passionate stories"—of the author of *Betsy Thoughtless*.

One of the better-known books which contained reminiscences of Fielding was Shebbeare's *Lydia* (1755). In this novel the author inserts a number of "dissertations" (e.g., Vol. I, ch. xxiii); indulges in mock-heroics ("the rosy-fisted morning" draws "the curtains" of the night); and introduces to us a Welsh chaplain, David ap Hugh, who on a salary of ten pounds a year supports a wife and six children (Vol. I, ch. vi). Evidently Shebbeare has Fielding in mind, for a few pages thereafter the author "modestly" exclaims "with Parson Adams—'*Non omnia possumus omnes.*'"⁵

Among the anonymia who curtsy to Fielding on their way to oblivion are Tristram Bates, David Ranger, and Hamilton Murray. In *The Life of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates* (1756), the hero finds in his benefactor's room "some occasional Pamphlets," "a Set of Spectators," and *Joseph Andrews*.⁶ The author of *The Juvenile Adventures of David Ranger* (1757) begins with a burlesque "Invocation by way of exordium:"—"OH! comic genius, oh! . . . And oh! thou muddy, unamiable, thou unsociable demon . . . of *dulness*"; and expects "at least to be treated with the same favor" as his contemporaries, among whom he mentions "the multi-loquent *Henry F*——."⁷ More modest is the biographer of *The Life and Real Adventures of Hamilton Murray* (1759), who professes not to have "a tythe" of "the merits of a Cer-

⁴ *Henrietta*, London, 1758, I, 36.

⁵ *Lydia*; or, *Filial Piety*, London, 1786. The dedication is dated May 30, 1755.

⁶ *The Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates*, London, 1756, p. 89. Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXVI, 405 (August, 1756).

⁷ *The Juvenile Adventures of David Ranger*, London, 1757, I, 1, 2, 5. Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXVI, 549 (November, 1756).

vantes, a Fielding, or a Smollet."⁸ Obviously, Fielding's name was one to conjure with.

Interesting as is the examination of this early ephemeral fiction for references to Fielding, the game is hardly worth the candle. He had set a difficult pattern, and his followers were more occupied with minor peculiarities of the form than with the major structure or the substance of his archetypal novels. The "*foule de mauvaises copies*," as Voltaire calls them, have deservedly fallen into oblivion; and the great Frenchman was right when he said that they had "*sensiblement diminué le goût*" for the great works which their authors professed to imitate.

As we pass now from imitators to assailants, it will be observed that attacks on Fielding did not by any means cease with his death; his enemies, personal and political, still made use of convenient opportunities to besmirch his character as a man and to diminish his reputation as a writer. Up to the time of Murphy's *Essay* (1762), and even later, old animosities rankled: by those of the opposite political party Fielding was still regarded as a turncoat; among the friends of Cibber he continued to be a dangerous "leveller"; to the adherents of Richardson he was, as always, an unblushing libertine. In successive editions of *Bampfylde-Moore Carew*, as we have said, the passages hostile to Fielding were long retained (not for another decade or two was the objectionable matter removed); and in *Jonathan Wild's Advice to his Successor* (1758), an abusive pamphlet on the subject of "thief-taking," Henry Fielding the Magistrate was referred to as "Henry Humbug."

Before Murphy's *Essay* appeared, one of Fielding's most prominent antagonists, the veteran Colley Cibber, had finally paid his debt to nature; but the slanders of his *Apology* were given new life by their inclusion in his friend Victor's *History of the Theatres* (1761). In this work—a reference book for posterity—succeeding generations might read again that when

⁸ *The Life and Real Adventures of Hamilton Murray*, London, 1759, I, 4.

Fielding "was in the Possession of the Little Theatre" he was in "the dishonest Employment" of an "Incendiary Writer," dealing "about his Satires most unmercifully against the first Minister," and, "as Cibber justly observes," "knocking down all Distinctions."⁹ In the columns of reviewers, as may be imagined, these ill weeds again took root and flourished *vingt ans après*; they even appeared (July, 1761) in *The Monthly Review*,¹⁰ which had been most friendly to the novelist.

Thus Fielding's spirit was tormented by Cibber *redivivus*; and there were living enemies, too, among whom were Paul Whitehead and—as of yore—Horace Walpole. It ill became the place-hunting Whitehead to insult the memory of Fielding dead; here are the lines, which occur in *An Epistle to Dr. Thompson* (1755):

Rich in these gifts, why should I wish for more?
Why barter conscience, for superfluous store?
Or haunt the Levee of a purse-proud peer,
To rob poor *F—ld—ng* of the curule chair?¹¹

Worse still was Walpole's attack. While describing the "Parish of Twickenham" (1759), where *Tom Jones* was reputed to have been written in part, Walpole could not refrain from saying:

Here Fielding met his bunter Muse
And, as they quaff'd the fiery juice,
Droll Nature stamp'd each lucky hit
With unimaginable wit.¹²

To anyone who did not know Walpole, the lines, except for the word "bunter," might be regarded as complimentary. This one word is, however, sufficient; "bunter," according to

⁹ Victor's *History of the Theatres*, London, 1761, I, 50-51.

¹⁰ *The Monthly Review*, XXV, 45.

¹¹ *An Epistle to Dr. Thompson*, Dublin, 1755, p. 4.

¹² See the "Parish Register," as quoted in Dobson's *Fielding*, New York, 1894, p. 112. "Written in or about the year 1758."—Cobbett, R. S., *Memorials of Twickenham*, London, 1872, p. 305. John Hoadly caught up the slander.—*The Private Correspondence of . . . Garrick*, II, 139.

Grose's *Dictionary*, was a cant term for a "dirty low prostitute."

Even more bitter was Samuel Richardson, in whom the old wound caused by his rival's popularity was still unhealed. Occasionally an obtuse correspondent would commit the unpardonable sin of praising Fielding. The Rev. Smyth Loftus, for example (November 12, 1756), tells Richardson that "Some time ago I was much pleased with a paper of Fielding's, wherein he represented the different effects which the labour of the hands and the head had upon the constitution."¹³ And during the following summer (May 31, 1757) Loftus again speaks of Fielding's observation, saying, "I cannot recollect one person who has been eminent for wit, that has not laboured under a sickly habit of body."¹⁴ Such *faux pas* as these did not improve Richardson's temper. We need not wonder that he wrote (December 7, 1756) the following epistle to Fielding's sister, after a reperusal of her *Familiar Letters*, in which he continued to find "new beauties": "Well might a critical judge of writing say, as he did to me, that your late brother's knowledge of it [*i.e.*, the human heart] was not (fine writer as he was) comparable to your's. His was but as the knowledge of the outside of a clock-work machine, while your's was that of all the finer springs and movements of the inside."¹⁵ Who was the "critical judge"? Was it Johnson? At any rate, the same figure was afterwards used by the Doctor to illustrate the difference between the works of Fielding and those of Richardson himself.

With this letter in mind we are in a better position, perhaps, to understand a passage in the introduction to Sarah Fielding's *Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*, a novel which appeared during the following year (1757). Here are listed, cheek by jowl, apropos of certain fictitious characters that have left a vivid impression upon the minds of readers, "the wonderful Achievements of Don Quixote," the "rural Innocence of a

¹³ *Correspondence of Richardson*, V, 156.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 166.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 104-105.

Joseph Andrews," and "the inimitable Virtues of *Sir Charles Grandison*."¹⁶ Why should Fielding's sister choose for her eulogy one of the least of her brother's characters? In her *Countess of Dellwyn*, two years later, she inserted an interesting reference to a character in *Tom Jones*. When the aged bridegroom has difficulty with the marriage ring, she says: "The very Gold seemed endued with Sense, and as if it had learned all the Knowledge of the moral Philosopher *Square*, appeared to be so fully acquainted with *the Fitness of Things*, as with great Indignation to decline being placed on the taper Finger of the blooming Virgin, by that withered Hand."¹⁷ Why, then, did she single out Joseph Andrews in her previous book? Who knows? Yet as Mr. Dobson pertinently remarks, "After this, it is, perhaps, not surprising to find" in the "List of Subscribers" for her *Lives*: "Mr. Richardson, 4 Books; Mrs. Richardson, 2 Books; a Gentleman through the Hands of Mr. R., 10 Books."¹⁸ But to return to the point under discussion—Whitehead, Walpole, Richardson, and others of less note, down to anonymous pamphleteers, were prone to disregard the command *Nil nisi bonum*; no doubt their animosity delayed the clearing of the critical atmosphere.

Certainly the atmosphere in 1760 was as yet far from clear; the relative positions assigned to Richardson and to Fielding in Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead*, which appeared during that year, reflect, in some measure, the comparative altitudes of these authors in the popular mind. To Richardson is given first place and the more enthusiastic praise; and though this fact may be partly accounted for by the circumstance that the dialogue in question was written, not by Lyttelton, but by his Richardsonian friend, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, Queen of the Blue Stockings, it is not likely that Fielding's patron would allow such a disparity to occur in print in his own publication unless it voiced the opinion commonly accepted by the world

¹⁶ *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*, London, 1757, p. iii.

¹⁷ *The . . . Countess of Dellwyn*, London, 1759, I, 6.

¹⁸ *Notes and Queries*, 6 S., IX, 77 (January 26, 1884).

of letters. Lyttelton, as we have observed, who thought highly of *Tom Jones*, warmly recommended the novel to others even before its publication; and it is known that in private conversation he delighted to honor Fielding. On being questioned by James Beattie regarding the witty men of the earlier generation—Pope, Swift, and others—he replied, “Henry Fielding, I assure you, had more wit and humour than all the persons we have been speaking of put together.”¹⁹ One might have thought that when he came to publish his *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760) he would have written glowingly of the author whose book he so much admired and to whom he had been particularly kind, an author who had been so generous in his acknowledgments. This, however, he did not choose to do; but Mrs. Montagu’s estimate²⁰ must have received his approval. Her characterization of the two novelists occurs in a dialogue between Plutarch and a Modern Bookseller. In *Clarissa*, according to the Bookseller, we see “the dignity of Heroism tempered by the meekness and humility of Religion, a perfect purity of mind, and sanctity of manners”; while Sir Charles Grandison is the “noble Pattern of every private Virtue.” Naturally enough, Plutarch desires to know whether the creator of such characters as these has any rival in the art of fiction; and the Bookseller makes the following answer: “Yes, we have another writer of these imaginary Histories; One who has not long since descended to these regions; his Name is Fielding, and his works, as I have heard the best judges say, have a true spirit of Comedy, and an exact representation of Nature, with fine moral touches. He has not indeed given lessons of pure and consummate Virtue, but he has exposed Vice and Meanness with all the powers of ridicule.”²¹

To be included at all in the “great” Lord Lyttelton’s book—before prose fiction had won its place among the learned—

¹⁹ Beattie, James, *Dissertations*, London, 1783, p. 571. Beattie calls him the “great” Lord Lyttelton.

²⁰ Mrs. Montagu was devoted to “sweet Pamela,” deplored “Shamela,” and spoke of her friend Miss Carter as *Clarissa* in the flesh.

²¹ *Dialogues of the Dead*, London, 1760, pp. 318-319.

was, of course, a significant honor for both Fielding and Richardson; and, since the *Dialogues* were very popular,²² was valuable in the way of subsequent reputation. But the fact that Fielding was allowed to play second fiddle to Richardson—in a work published by his patron—is evidence that he had not by 1760 succeeded in wresting from Richardson the title of premier novelist. “Moral touches” there might be in Fielding’s work, but it was Richardson who was regarded as the profound ethical teacher. One can imagine the delight with which, in 1759, the author of *Clarissa* would hear the news that Adam Smith, professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* had publicly acknowledged his preëminence as one of the greatest moralists of all the ages. “The poets and romance writers,” he declares, “who best paint the refinements and delicacies of love and friendship, and of all other private and domestic affections, Racine and Voltaire, Richardson, Marivaux, and Riccoboni, are, in such cases, much better instructors than Zeno, Chrisippus, or Epictetus.”²³

How different at this very time was the case of Fielding, who, for telling truth with a laughing face, paid—like many another writer before and since—the severest penalty. “By the Late Ingenious Henry Fielding of Facetious Memory,” runs the title-page of a pamphlet dated 1759.²⁴ And again, of the spurious *Life and Adventures of a Cat . . . By the late Mr. Fielding*, the *Critical Review* says, “A worthy inhabitant of Grub-street would palm himself upon us for the identical Henry Fielding, Esq; of facetious memory.”²⁵ George Alexander Stevens, the playwright, in his *Adventures of a Speculist*, asks, “Who is it among our wits and moralists for, now-a-

²² Even Dr. Johnson concedes, in his *Lives of the Poets*, that the “dialogues” were “very eagerly read.”

²³ Smith, A., *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, new edition (Bohn), London, 1911, Part III, ch. iii (“Of the . . . Sense of Duty”), pp. 200-201. First published in 1759.

²⁴ According to Professor Cross this was Fielding’s *Ovid’s Art of Love* as reprinted at Dublin (1759).—*Fielding*, II, 52.

²⁵ *The Critical Review*, IX, 420 (May, 1760).

THE
L I F E
AND
ADVENTURES
OF A
C A T.

By the late Mr. FIELDING.



L O N D O N:
Printed for JOHN SEYMOUR, in Pater-
Noster-Row.
M.DCC.LX.

days, all our *Wits* are *Moralists*—that takes it upon him to say, 'Man differs more from man than *brute* from *brute*?' Yes, now I recollect, [it was] Harry Fielding."²⁶ Fielding's main reputation was that of a "wit"; he was usually characterized by his admirers—to use the words of Edward Moore in *The World*, June 12, 1755—as "the witty and ingenious author of Tom Jones." Apropos at this point is the prescription for curing "the Blew Devils" which Lord Dacre sent (in May, 1757) to his friend Sanderson Miller, the architect, who, as we have observed, had presumably heard at Radway Grange the reading in whole or in part of the unpublished *Tom Jones*: "Eat wholesome meats: few flabby or flatulent ones: or that produce bile; as Butter, Pye crust, etc., etc., your Favourites; Drink not much Tea: or Coffee, or even Chocolate. . . . Let no one thing induce you now to Read too serious or abstracted Books: Don Quixote is better for you than all of them put together, or Gil Blas or Tom Jones or Joseph Andrews: In all this *Experto Crede*."²⁷ Lord Dacre's remedy seems to have proved to be efficacious, for Sanderson Miller's life was spared for some twenty years longer.

In his own century, Fielding's "facetiousness" overshadowed his more solid qualities. Friend and foe, however, did not scruple to accept hints from their "facetious master." According to Chalmers, the "ludicrous distresses of a credulous clergyman" depicted by Edward Moore in *The World* is a reminiscence "in some degree, of Parson Adams";²⁸ while of the Parson's influence on two of Fielding's greatest successors, Mr. Dobson writes: "It is certain—as Mr. Forster and Mr. Keightley have pointed out—that Goldsmith borrowed some of his characteristics for Dr. Primrose, and it has been suggested that Sterne remembered him in more than one page of

²⁶ *The Adventures of a Speculist*, London, 1788, II, 73. The observation here quoted was made some "thirty years" before.

²⁷ *An Eighteenth-Century Correspondence*, London, 1910, p. 366. Lord Dacre was Thomas Barrett Lennard, 26th Baron Dacre, born 1717.

²⁸ *The British Essayists*, London, 1802, XXVI, xix.

Tristram Shandy.”²⁹ But if they *were* indebted to Fielding, neither of them appears to have cared to praise him. Certainly nothing that has been important enough to quote seems to have been found in the works of Sterne; and Goldsmith in at least one passage has spoken against his great predecessor.

Was Goldsmith really shocked by Fielding? Was he “instructed” by Richardson while in the printer’s employ? It is difficult to say. That he was influenced by Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*—not, perhaps, to the extent of plagiarism—in his *Vicar of Wakefield* has often been asserted;³⁰ yet he is on record as speaking disparagingly of the elder novelist. The well-known reference in *The Bee*, November 10, 1759, runs as follows: “Instead, therefore, of romances, which praise young men of spirit, who go through a variety of adventures, and, at last, conclude a life of dissipation, folly, and extravagance, in riches and matrimony, there should be some men of wit employed to compose books that might equally interest the passions of our youth; the old story of Whittington, were his cat left out, might be more serviceable to the tender mind than either Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, or a hundred others, where frugality is the only good quality the hero is not possessed of.”³¹

Letter LXXXIII of the *Citizen of the World*, in which Goldsmith denounces “romances” as “instruments of debauchery,” contains another passage which may possibly refer to Fielding. In these “dangerous fictions, where love is the ruling passion,” writes Goldsmith, the “most indecent strokes there pass for turns of wit; intrigue and criminal liberties for gallantry and politeness. Assignations, and even villainy, are put in such strong lights, as may inspire even grown men with the

²⁹ Dobson’s *Fielding*, New York, 1883, p. 75.

³⁰ See Forster’s *Life of Goldsmith*, London, 1848, pp. 361-362. Hazlitt, in his article on “Standard Novels” (*Edin. Rev.*, XXIV, 328, February, 1815), asserts that the story of the “Vicar” is “an almost entire plagiarism.” Against this charge see Goldsmith’s *Works*, Bohn’s Library, new ed., London, 1884, I, 66.

³¹ *The Bee*, No. VI; see *Works*, Bohn’s Library, new ed., London, 1884, II, 405.

strongest passion; how much more, therefore, ought the young of either sex to dread them, whose reason is so weak, and whose hearts are so susceptible of passion? To slip in by a back-door, or leap a wall, are accomplishments that, when handsomely set off, enchant a young heart. It is true, the plot is commonly wound up by a marriage, concluding with the consent of parents, and adjusted by every ceremony prescribed by law. But, as in the body of the work, there are many passages that offend good morals, overthrow laudable customs, violate the laws, and destroy the duties most essential to society, virtue is thereby exposed to the most dangerous attacks. 'But, say some, the authors of these romances have nothing in view, but to represent vice punished, and virtue rewarded.'"³² Is this another attack upon Fielding? Very possibly; for there is considerable likeness between this passage and the previous one. It *may* be, as one editor suggests (in view of the last sentence), an allusion to Richardson, though, as that author was thought to have taught the passions to move at the command of virtue, such an explanation is less probable. Or, again, it may be a reference to Smollett; but Goldsmith, who went out of his way to attack Sterne, was so unrepelled by Smollett's grossness that he cordially welcomed *Launcelot Greaves*. No, it is not clear that Goldsmith here referred either to Richardson or to Smollett; if any single author was glanced at it was probably Fielding. Surely about the previous passage, the one from the *Citizen of the World*, there can be (despite the fact that Goldsmith was writing of the influence of fiction upon the young) no question; it clearly voices disapprobation. Three of the men, by the way, who were at different times useful to Goldsmith, were three of Fielding's strongest defamers: Richardson, Smollett, and Johnson. Still it is to be observed that in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, published some years later, there is a not unfriendly reference to *Tom Jones*; in that novel Olivia Primrose, we are told, had acquired some of her notable proficiency in controversy by perusing the debates between Thwackum

³² *Works*, Bohn's Library, new ed., London, 1885, III, 311-312.

and Square. Again, in another place, Goldsmith speaks of Fielding's recognition of the poet Boyse;³³ and in the first edition of *Animated Nature* (1774, the year of the author's death), he refers to Fielding's statement "that he never knew a person with a steady glavering smile, but he found him a rogue."³⁴ Perhaps, like many another in that century, Goldsmith had a higher opinion of his predecessor than he was willing to admit.

A word should now be said of the comparative popularity of Richardson and Fielding across the Channel. Concerning this matter there is an interesting passage in the *Letters and Journals* of Mrs. Calderwood of Polton, who, inspired by Fielding, composed a novel (*Fanny Roberts*), never printed, in which an English squire (according to her editor) "in talk and manners out-Westerns the squire in *Tom Jones*." "All Richardson's books," she writes (1756), "are translated, and much admired abroad; but for Fielding's, the foreigners have no notion of them, and do not understand them, as the manners are so intirely English."³⁵ During the next decade the vogue of the sentimental had increased to such a degree that Walpole, who characterized *Clarissa* and *Grandison* as "deplorably tedious lamentations," discovered on his visit to Paris in 1765 that Richardson was (with Hume) the reigning English favorite and that his works had "stupefied the whole French nation."³⁶

This reputed popularity of Richardson over the water was noted in England with great satisfaction; so close were the literary relations between the two countries during this period that it became a ponderable element in the ascendancy which Richardson enjoyed over his chief competitor. Fielding, as we have remarked, had been unfortunate in his translators: by

³³ *Works*, V, 151.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 202.

³⁵ *Letters and Journals of Mrs. Calderwood of Polton from England Holland and the Low Countries in 1756*, Edinburgh, 1884, pp. 356-357, 208.

³⁶ Walpole's *Letters*, edited by Toynbee, VI, 163, 284, 370.

leaving out the "digressions" and initial essays and retaining only the mere story of *Tom Jones*, La Place had presented to his countrymen a Fielding utterly denatured—not until the end of the century was there an attempt to restore the omitted passages; by adapting, instead of translating, Mme. Riccoboni did even worse by *Amelia*. Richardson, on the other hand, had been very lucky; it is common knowledge that *his* style gained rather than lost by its passage into the more elegant medium of French. Of course this is only part of the story, and even to attempt to tell the rest of it would be out of place here. But it may be observed that the hue and cry on both sides of the Channel was for that very sentimentalism which Fielding had squarely opposed. Fréron (in 1751), as Joseph Texte points out, could not forgive the "low comedy" which he found in (La Place's translation of) *Tom Jones*.⁸⁷ Considering the frequency of editions, to be sure, we may suspect that Texte overstates the case regarding Fielding's lack of popularity in France; at any rate, further research in this matter is greatly to be desired. But even if the point be some day conclusively proved, the result either way can have little bearing on our present investigation. Our interest is solely in one question: What was the prevailing opinion in *England* regarding the relative fame of Fielding and Richardson abroad? The answer is absolutely clear—it was Richardson and not Fielding who was thought to have made the brilliant success across the water. Literary people in England were justly proud of Richardson's triumph and were especially fond of giving reasons for it; unquestionably the approbation of Richardson abroad was a considerable factor at home in exalting him above his great contemporary.

Imagine the impression made in England by such pronouncements as the following. Of *Clarissa*, Marmontel had written in the *Mercure de France* (August, 1758), "I do not think that the age can show a more faithful, more delicate, more spirited touch"; and of *Grandison*—that "masterpiece

⁸⁷ *Lettres sur quelques écrits*, 1751, V, 3, as quoted by Joseph Texte.

of the most healthy philosophy"—he declared, "Antiquity, can show nothing more exquisite." And Rousseau, whose name was on everyone's lips, wrote D'Alembert (1758) that "nothing was ever written equal or even approaching to" *Clarissa* "in any language."³⁸

When Fielding died, in 1754, the news seems to have evoked singularly little comment; in 1761, when Richardson died, the event drew forth not only public eulogy from his coterie of admirers in England but almost fanatical panegyric from his worshipers abroad. Not until the end of the century, when Gibbon declared in his stately way that *Tom Jones* would outlast the ruling house of Austria, did praise of Fielding even approximate in fervor the rhapsodical *éloge* which Diderot pronounced on the occasion of Richardson's death. Fully to realize this statement it is well to have the celebrated eulogy before us; the following excerpt will recall it to memory:

O my friends! 'Pamela,' 'Clarissa,' and 'Grandison' are three great dramas! Torn from reading them by important business, I felt an overwhelming distaste for it; I neglected my work and returned to Richardson. Beware of opening these enchanting books when you have any important duties to perform. . . . O Richardson, Richardson, first of all men in my eyes, you shall be my reading at all times! Pursued by pressing need; if my friend should fall into poverty; if the limitations of my fortunes should prevent me from giving fit attention to the education of my children, I will sell my books; but you shall remain on the same shelf as Moses, Homer, Euripides and Sophocles, and I will read you by turns.³⁹

³⁸ This was one of the purple passages which Mrs. Barbauld's brother, Dr. Aikin, enshrined in *General Biography* (1813). See *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, 1909, I, 233 note. For Marmontel see his *Œuvres Complètes*, nouvelle éd., Paris, 1819, X, 343, 340, 345.

³⁹ For the French original see *Œuvres de Denis Diderot*, Paris, 1821, III, 10-11. Diderot did not ignore Fielding. "I shall not be satisfied with you or with myself," he wrote Mlle. Volland, October 20, 1760, "until I have brought you to relish the truth of *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison*" (XVIII, 514); but in another letter, September 17, 1761, he declares on a reperusal of *Clarissa*—"My eyes filled

When a great French philosopher could express himself publicly after this fashion, is it any wonder that the report of Richardson's vogue in France seemed to be confirmed?

One of the striking facts about the "Essay on Fielding" prefixed by the editor, Arthur Murphy, to the first collected edition of the *Works* in 1762, was the almost entire absence of *dicta* from those in authority concerning Fielding's novels. Absolutely the only passage which Murphy found to quote was the little footnote which Warburton inserted in his edition of Pope. The truth is that in spite of the novelist's popularity—a popularity which cannot be doubted or minimized—distinguished men of letters had not yet come forward conspicuously in his support. Not yet did he have to his credit the tributes which had been showered upon Richardson at home nor the rhapsodical eulogy of admiring notables across the Channel.

again with tears. I could no longer read, I arose, and began to grieve, to apostrophize the brother, the sister, the father, the mother, and the uncles, talking aloud, to Damilaville's great amazement" (XIX, 47).—R. L. Cru's *Diderot*, New York, 1913, pp. 340-341. Cru's references are to *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, 1875-1877.

CHAPTER VII

Murphy's "Life" of Fielding

1762

I

WHEN, in 1762, Millar, the publisher, brought out the first collected edition of Fielding's works, the time was propitious for a sane and careful biography of the author written by an impartial hand. He had been dead eight years; and, though the slanderous stories of his ancient enemies still circulated and obtained credence, a competent biographer, with the aid of John and Sarah Fielding and others, might have established a Fielding of Fact in place of a Fielding of Fiction. No such good fortune came to the novelist; the *Life*, biographical and critical, was entrusted to the shallow and pompous young Irishman, Arthur Murphy. A decade before, as we have seen, Murphy, in his *Gray's-Inn Journal*, had warmly commended Fielding's novels and had fought on his side against Dr. John Hill. Very possibly it was he, however, who furnished Millar with the apologetic "Dedication" to the *Voyage to Lisbon* (1755). And now, seven years later, when the task of preparing the *Life* was before him, Murphy took advantage of the opportunity to exploit himself at the expense of his friend—patronizing the author in the most vulgar manner, utterly neglecting even an elementary investigation of facts, incorporating into his narrative some of the worst inventions of Fielding's enemies, and meretriciously adorning his rhetorical essay with irrelevant disquisitions upon the ancients and irrelevant passages from two modern writers—Warburton and Hurd—whom it was politic to praise. This villainous sketch of Fielding, written as it was by a supposed friend and professing as it did special lenity toward the failings of its subject, was to do more harm eventually than the combined efforts of those declared enemies of Fielding (such



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as the scurrilous *Grub-street Journal* and the malignant *Old England*) to whose scandalous stories the young Irishman lent so willing an ear. Appearing, as it did, prefixed to the elegant first edition of Fielding's *Works*, Murphy's "Essay" was accepted practically at its face value during the last half of the eighteenth century and also during the greater part of the nineteenth. Only within the past two generations has the flimsiness of Murphy's performance been the subject of interested and competent investigation; and only since Austin Dobson's biography in 1883 has the presentment of a different Fielding been at all generally accepted.

Murphy's "Essay" reflects—perhaps unconsciously—the pressure of accumulated contemporary enmity; even a period of eight years had failed to dispel the odium which had attached to Fielding's reputation. As we examine the evidence that has come down to us, we are amazed to find that a man who posed as the novelist's friend should feel it necessary to assume a tone so apologetic. "Shall we now," he asks, "after the manner of the *Egyptian* ritual, frame a public accusation against his memory?" Murphy will do no such thing; he will not "tear off ungenerously the shroud from his remains, and pursue him with a cruelty of narrative till the reader's sense is shocked, and is forced to express his horror." Rather he will make excuses for his friend's delinquencies: his "occasional" "peevishness"; his association as a youth "with the voluptuous of all ranks"; his "want of refinement"; his custom of inuring "his body to the dangers of intemperance" over "a social bottle"; the frequent "indelicacy, and sometimes the downright obscenity of his raillery"; the exigencies in which "that nice delicacy of conduct, which alone constitutes and preserves a character," was "occasionally obliged to give way"; the questionable "choice of the means to redress himself" when "his finances were exhausted." "In short," observes Murphy, "our author was unhappy, but not vicious in his nature"; he had a "sense of honour" as "lively and delicate as most men," though "sometimes his passions were too turbulent for it, or rather his necessities were too pressing"; but "in all cases where

delicacy was departed from, his friends knew how his feelings reprimanded him." No, Murphy will not "disturb the manes of the dead"; he will be "more humane and generous"; he will "set down to the account of slander and defamation a great part of that abuse which was discharged against him by his enemies, in his lifetime"; still, *mirabile dictu*, he will deduce "from the whole, this useful lesson": that "dissipation and extravagant pleasures are the most dangerous palliatives that can be found for disappointments and vexations in the first stages of life."

What were, we may well ask, those lapses from virtue and delicacy on the part of Fielding over which the biographer will draw the veil? As Mr. Frederick Dickson rightly said, in his article on "Thackeray and Fielding" in *The North American Review*, if specific instances had been available, surely Richardson and Johnson would have found them out, and "exploited" them, "writ large."¹ But the rhetorical Murphy was unhampered by the modern spirit of investigation. Knowing nothing of Fielding's earlier career except from hearsay, caring nothing for the truth, and regarding the "life" merely as a means of self-exploitation, he did little more—as Professor Cross has conclusively shown in his chapter on "The Shadow of Arthur Murphy"²—than "revise" the fictitious portrait which the novelist's enemies had concocted out of their own evil hearts and out of the characters of his plays and novels, and had kept so constantly in the public eye that even before his death it had become traditional. According to *Old England* and the anonymous pamphleteers, Fielding was guilty of every crime in the catalogue: as we have previously related, he was accused of being a Tom Jones, a Booth, and even a Jonathan Wild; he was a "libertine," a political "turncoat," a "needy vagrant," a "sponger," a "trading justice," a foe to "religion and virtue." The story of these slanders—already told in part

¹ "William Makepeace Thackeray and Henry Fielding," *The North American Review*, CXCVII, 527 (April, 1913).

² Cross's *Fielding*, Vol. III, ch. xxxi.

—need not be repeated here; in them the pliant Murphy found an opportunity too good for a man of his stamp to miss. Some of the charges that had been made against Fielding, Murphy, indeed, took pains to refute; but before he finished, to use the words of Professor Cross, he had turned "most" of Fielding's "virtues" into "imperfections, follies, and vices." And the resultant caricature, which he thus gave the world in 1762, did the novelist's business for posterity so effectually that not until Professor Cross's biography in 1918, when Murphy's iniquitous performance was entirely overhauled, was a complete portrait of Fielding the Man at last available. As we trace the fortunes of the great novels from decade to decade during the period of a century and a half that has elapsed since the "Essay," we shall realize again and again how difficult it was for writers of succeeding generations to keep their estimates of Fielding's art from being biased and distorted by Murphy's disparagement of the man himself. Behind the books will appear from time to time the apparition of that careless, ill-governed, over-emotional, irritable, voluptuous, unfortunate prodigal, who smoked so furiously, drank so excessively, and squandered so ruinously.

Such was the friendly office rendered by the pompous and patronizing Arthur Murphy, who, if report be true, was little qualified to sit in judgment upon the morals of Henry Fielding. And though, as will presently be observed, that part of the "Essay" which was devoted to a criticism of the novels was far less reprehensible—nay, even in many respects commendable—than the biographical section, it was vitiated and disabled by being in such bad company. As a critic as well as a biographer, Murphy had an eye to business; here was a fine chance to further his own ends. Since everyone was interested in Alexander Pope and in Warton's *Essay* on that author's "Writings and Genius," which had recently appeared (1756), Murphy will "pause" for a while (one seventh of his time!), ostensibly to define the word "*genius*," but actually to discuss the "Rape of the Lock" or the funeral ceremonies of the Egyptians; he will include a flattering and irrelevant excerpt

from a "Dissertation" by Hurd or from the great Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*; and he will drag in a small dissertation of his own on the Athenian Middle Comedy. And when at last he finds time to say something of the novels of Henry Fielding, he will indulge himself in pompous rhetorical figures which, despite their orotund quality, effect little in the way of illumination. The most appropriate of these analogies (which has to do with *Amelia*) reads as follows: "A fine vein of morality runs through the whole; many of the situations are affecting and tender; the sentiments are delicate; and, upon the whole, it is the *Odyssey*, the moral and pathetic work of Henry Fielding." Often quoted in subsequent reference books, this similitude, if left without qualifications, would be happy enough. But Murphy was not satisfied; he must make *Amelia* do duty in another figurative scheme. Since *Joseph Andrews* is to represent the sunrise and *Tom Jones* the noontide glory of Fielding's genius, *Amelia* must serve as the setting sun³ of the author's day; it must illustrate the natural decline of his powers. And so Murphy goes on to say that *Amelia* has "marks of genius, but of a genius beginning to fall into its decay. The author's invention in this performance does not appear to have lost its fertility; his judgment too seems as strong as ever; but the warmth of imagination is abated; and in his landships or his scenes of life Mr. Fielding is no longer the colourist he was before." To foist such a scheme (rise, climax, and dissolution!) upon a man of forty-four, whose novel-writing had all been done in less than ten years, was ill-advised and misleading. *Amelia* is different from *Joseph Andrews* and also from *Tom Jones*; it represents, however, not a falling-off of genius but simply excellence of a different kind. In a footnote, Murphy informs his readers that the *Amelia* of his edition is printed from a copy "corrected by the author's own hand," in which "exceptionable passages" are now "retrenched." Hereafter the public will no longer be troubled by the "noselessness" of *Amelia*; but it is sufficiently apparent that Murphy

³ Presumably a reminiscence of Longinus on the *Odyssey*.

has not forgotten the abuse which had been heaped upon Fielding's heroine a decade before. While he devotes several pages to the criticism of *Tom Jones*, he polishes off *Amelia* in a single paragraph—a fact which clearly reflects the low esteem in which this novel was still (1762) commonly held.

Of *Joseph Andrews* Murphy is not unappreciative. "Nothing could be more happily conceived," he writes, "than the character of Parson Adams," whom he compares—taking Fielding at his word—to the Knight of La Mancha himself. And though he thinks that the "main action" of *Joseph Andrews* is culpably "trivial and unimportant," he predicts that because of its great central character, its comic situations, and its "fine turns of surprise" this novel will be "among the few works of invention, produced by the English writers, which will always continue in request."

It is for *Tom Jones*, however, that Murphy reserves the main place and space in his "Essay." "If we consider" the work "in the same light in which the ablest critics have examined the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, and the *Paradise Lost*, namely, with a view to the fable, the manners, the sentiments, and the stile, we shall find it standing the test of the severest criticism, and indeed bearing away the envied praise of a complete performance." To the fable, or plot, of *Tom Jones* he pays a high tribute, comparing the course of the story to that of a river, "which, in its progress, foams amongst fragments of rocks, and for a while seems pent up by unsurmountable oppositions; then angrily dashes for a while, then plunges underground into caverns, and runs a subterraneous course, till at length it breaks out again, meanders round the country, and with a clear placid stream flows gently into the ocean." This passage constitutes only a part of the Hibernian rhetoric which Murphy expends upon the perfection of Fielding's plot, than which "no fable whatever affords, in its solution, such artful states of suspence, such beautiful turns of surprise, such unexpected incidents, and such sudden discoveries, sometimes apparently embarrassing, but always promising the catastrophe, and eventually promoting the completion of the whole."

As for the *dramatis personae*, though Murphy praises Allworthy, he is not blind to the fact that this character is somewhat "laboured"; Squire Western is most "entertaining"; Thwackum and Square are "excellently opposed to each other"; and Jones himself, he declares, will be a "fine lesson to young men of good tendencies to virtue, who yet suffer the impetuosity of their passions to hurry them away." "In short," concludes Murphy, "all the characters down to Partridge, and even to a maid or an hostler at an inn, are drawn with truth and humour; and indeed they abound so much, and are so often brought forward in a dramatic manner, that every thing may be said to be here in action; every thing has MANNERS; and the very manners which belong to it in human life. They look, they act, they speak to our imaginations, just as they appear to us in the world. The SENTIMENTS which they utter, are peculiarly annexed to their habits, passions and ideas; which is what poetical propriety requires; and, to the honour of the author, it must be said, that, whenever he addresses us in person, he is always in the interests of virtue and religion, and inspires a strain of moral reflection, a true love of goodness, and honour, with a just detestation of imposture, hypocrisy, and all specious pretenses to uprightness."

The estimate given above of the plot and characters of *Tom Jones* sounds trite enough to us now. It is only fair to say that it was not so trite in 1762; no one—at least no one at all well known—had, before Murphy, given publicly so elaborate and so favorable a criticism of Fielding's novels. And there are in the "Essay" one or two other features to be commended. Since the *Journey from this World to the Next* has "provoked the dull, short-sighted, and malignant enemies" of Fielding "to charge him with an intention to subvert the settled notions of mankind in philosophy and religion," Murphy defends the author by quoting appositely from the preface of the *Miscellanies*. From the same preface, also, he excerpts that excellent passage in which Fielding explains the significance of *Jonathan Wild*; and though obliged by his rhetorical figure to assert that this great book falls "very short of that

higher order of composition which our author attained in his other pieces of invention," he obviously appreciates its "noble purpose." In general, Murphy declares, "Fielding was more attached to the *manners* than to the *heart*": the "strong specific qualities of his personages he sets forth with a few masterly strokes, but the nicer and more subtle workings of the mind he is not so anxious to investigate"; yet by this Murphy does not mean that Fielding is superficial, for he regards as one of his chief claims to excellence the fact that "he saw the latent sources of human actions"—a point which Hazlitt elaborated many years later.

There are good things here—for we must allow the devil his due—yet, all in all, Murphy's stiff and pompous essay gives us a very inadequate idea of the radiant *comédie humaine* which it discusses; while his bearing toward the author is nothing short of intolerable. We get from him little notion of Fielding's ability and success as a magistrate (though he defends him against the charge of corruption in that office); the general impression which he conveys is that of a reckless and rather dissolute fellow whose follies and vices terminate in ruin and in misery—even the gallant and intrepid spirit of the *Voyage to Lisbon* (to the biographer actually reprehensible) is the "jesting" of a condemned man upon "the scaffold." The results of modern investigation have tended more and more to discredit this view of Fielding; it has become increasingly certain that the man himself was no such Boothlike creature as Murphy would have us believe. Why, we may well ask, should he so represent him? Did he really and righteously disapprove of his elder friend's morals? Or was he borne down by common adverse report and opinion? Of Fielding's early life he knew nothing at first hand; when he was publishing the *Gray's-Inn Journal*, a few years before Fielding's death, he was still in his early twenties; when *Joseph Andrews* appeared he was only a boy. We have no particular reason for thinking that Murphy bore any malice toward Fielding; it is even possible that he actually believed he was writing handsomely of his former benefactor. But what he really did was to fashion

a portrait out of the libels which the forces of Grub Street had, by their violent and continued scurrility, succeeded in making popular. Such materials, as Murphy presumably realized, furnished a much more picturesque biographical sketch than the sober truth; furthermore, he was well enough assured of the prevailing attitude toward Fielding to write after this fashion. The "Essay," therefore, as far as the biographical part is concerned, may be considered a reflection of a contemporary enmity that had not yet passed away.

II

So far as we may judge, Murphy's account of Fielding, biographical as well as critical, was regarded by his audience as entirely satisfactory. In 1762, of course, the Newspaper War of the previous decade and the abuse to which Fielding had been subjected were still fresh in the minds of a great number of Murphy's readers. No wonder the magnanimous biographer's professed intention of drawing "the friendly veil" over the writer's "failings" was taken at its face value. Compared with the scurrilous aspersions of former enemies, this apologetic defense from one who posed as a friend of the novelist must, indeed, have seemed to the general public "handsome" treatment.

Oddly enough, those who *did* know what a rascally performance Murphy's "Essay" really was (Fielding's sister Sarah and his brother John, for example) seem not to have left on record any intimation of the fact. John Fielding, who appeared a number of times in print, had taken occasion in his *Extracts* (1761) to praise Henry's efficiency as a magistrate;⁴ and in 1778, endeavoring to insure the success of *The Fathers*, he included more praise of his brother in the dedication of the play to the Duke of Northumberland.⁵ But if he ever

⁴ *Extracts from such of the Penal Laws, as . . . relate to the Peace . . . of the Metropolis*, new ed., 1769, pp. 4, 321, 322. First edition published in October, 1761.

⁵ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, new ed., London, 1783, IV, 369-370.

remonstrated against Murphy's *Life* no account of such remonstrance has, apparently, come down to us. It should be remembered, perhaps, that upon Henry's brother John fell the burden of supporting the widow and the children; and though—to his credit be it spoken—he manfully performed this obligation, it is conceivable that, while bearing up under the whims of that lady (there appears to have been some friction at times) and under the irritating condescension of those who still sneered at the "cook-maid" sister-in-law, he may not have been exactly in the mood to set Murphy to rights concerning his celebrated brother.

How was it with Fielding's worthy and accomplished sister? As has been seen, Sarah Fielding nobly defended her brother during his lifetime against the unjust abuse of his contemporaries. But if she had any quarrel with Murphy's portrait she seems not to have recorded it. In spite of her generous early defense of her brother, was there a tinge of jealousy in her mind? We have already spoken of Richardson's praise, two years after Fielding's death, of the "finer springs and movements"⁶ which distinguish *not* the superficial Henry but the profound Sarah Fielding. Imagine the flutter of pride which she must have experienced to be thus praised by the man to whom she bowed in worship! And there was Margaret Collier, who had written to Richardson the year before (October 3, 1755), "If they [*i.e.*, women authors] write well, and very ingeniously, and have a brother, then to be sure—'She could not write so well; it was her brother's, no doubt.'"⁷ We may take it for granted that Sarah Fielding heard not a little talk of this kind; nor would it be unnatural for her to agree with her friends in their opinion. Still one wonders how both brother and sister could have kept their composure in the face of Arthur Murphy's misrepresentations. By the general public Murphy seems to have been taken at his own estimate: he assured his audience that he was doing well by Fielding, the Man and the Author; and the reading world believed him.

⁶ *Correspondence of Richardson*, II, 104-105 (December 7, 1756).

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 77.

As was to be expected, not a word about the beautiful new edition (except the item in the "List of Books") was allowed to appear in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. And though Murphy must have known how Johnson (whose favor he was now courting) regarded the author, he was doubtless chagrined when Mr. Urban utterly ignored not only Fielding in his elegant dress but the elegant essay which introduced him. By the two literary periodicals at this time influential, however,—the *Monthly* and the *Critical*,—Murphy's "Essay" was well received; in *The Annual Register*, also, it was honored by a long excerpt. Adapting Murphy's own statement, *The Monthly Review* (which printed copious extracts from the "Essay") declared that "the ingenious Biographer" had "not deviated from the custom of those who write the life of a favourite author, in displaying his good qualities to the best advantage, and drawing a friendly veil over his failings."⁸ In *The Critical Review* for July, 1762, Fielding is characterized as the "neglected slave of an ungrateful people, who admired without rewarding his genius"; and Murphy's prefatory life is styled "an elegant monument" erected to his memory, an essay in which "good sense, delicacy, and taste shine forth in every page." The reviewer speaks of Murphy's digressions, especially the opening platitudes, and his emphasis upon the author's writings rather than upon his life; yet he declares that, after all, the digressions constitute "the greatest excellency of the performance" before him, which is allowed to possess all the "requisites of good writing." Only one stricture does he make on Murphy's estimate of the novels: "We know that many readers will condemn the taste of the critic, for giving Tom Jones the preference to Joseph Andrews," which in his opinion, though not so intricate, and regular in "fable," possesses more humor and "natural painting."⁹ Murphy had, therefore, no cause to complain of the two excellent notices in *The*

⁸ *The Monthly Review*, XXVII, 55 (July, 1762). The article began in May (XXVI, 364-375), ran on into the Appendix for January-June (XXVI, 481-494), and was concluded in July (XXVII, 49-56).

⁹ *The Critical Review*, XIV, 1-21 (July, 1762).

Monthly Review and *The Critical Review* concerning his efforts both as a critic and as a biographer. Moreover, Andrew Millar had taken particular pains with the book-work; in the words of that great admirer of Fielding, George Colman, the edition was an "elegant" one.¹⁰

In the literary world not very much stir was created, apparently, by Murphy's edition of Fielding; yet it presumably furnished the inspiration for the following excellent verses by Christopher Smart, which, by the way, appeared in several magazines:

The master of the GREEK and ROMAN page,
The lively scorner of a venal age,
Who made the publick laugh, at publick vice,
Or drew from sparkling eyes the pearl of price;
Student of nature, reader of mankind,
In whom the patron, and the bard were join'd;
As free to give the plaudit, as assert,
And faithful in the practise of desert.
Hence pow'r consign'd the laws to his command,
And put the scales of Justice in his hand;
To stand protector of the Orphan race,
And find the female penitent a place.
From toils like these, too much for age to bear,
From pain, from sickness, and a world of care;
From children, and a widow in her bloom,
From shores remote, and from a foreign tomb,
Called by the WORD of LIFE, thou shalt appear,
To *please* and *profit* in a higher sphere,
Where endless hope, imperishable gain
Are what the scriptures *teach* and *entertain*.¹¹

It is significant of the state of affairs in the Mid-Century that for a real appreciation of Fielding (in England) such as this

¹⁰ Colman's *Prose on Several Occasions*, London, 1787, II, 27.

¹¹ Smart, C., *Poems on Several Occasions*, London, 1763, pp. 13-14. This is the most satisfactory version of the poem. For others see *The St. James's Magazine*, II, 312 (July, 1763); *The London Magazine*, XXXII, 441 (August, 1763).

we must turn away from the fashionable coteries and seek out a poor mad poet whom the novelist had befriended.¹²

Not the earnest and "lively scorner of a venal age" of Christopher Smart's verses but the improvident and dissipated genius depicted by Arthur Murphy was the standard representation of Henry Fielding after 1762. Placed in the first volume of the collected *Works*, Murphy's "Essay" held a commanding position throughout the eighteenth century. It was reprinted and reprinted (in succeeding editions of the *Works*), it was frequently abridged or paraphrased; but until Watson's *Life* appeared in 1807 there was not even a competitor—and Watson, as will be seen, who did little more than expand the "Essay," was perhaps worse than Murphy himself. One of the first influential immediate adaptations of Murphy's "Essay" was the account of Fielding which appeared two years later in D. E. Baker's *The Companion to the Play-House* (1764). Though, quoting Murphy, he declares that it "will be an humane and generous Office, to set down to the Account of Slander and Defamation, a great Part of that Abuse which was discharged against him by his Enemies in his Life-Time," Baker simply repeats from Murphy's "Essay" the old stories of Fielding's extravagance and dissipation. Of the great books, he omits all detailed criticism, contenting himself with the statement (which by the way, has been often repeated since) that the "celebrated Novels," *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, are "too well known and too justly admired to leave us any Room for expatiating upon their Merits." The omission of *Amelia* in this enumeration is doubtless not due to haste or carelessness. Murphy had slighted *Amelia*, but he wound up by calling it Fielding's *Odyssey*; Baker is evidently afraid to say that it is admired at all.

Baker's account is, then, little more than a rehash of Murphy's "Essay," which thus became part and parcel of one of the main authorities on the English theatre; renamed and added

¹² The editor of *L'Année Littéraire* (1763, II, 26) writes: "[Fielding] s'est rendu immortel par les romans de *Joseph Andrews* et de *Tom Jones*: on baise aujourd'hui la trace de ses pas."

to by others, *The Companion to the Play-House* finally appeared as the celebrated *Biographia Dramatica*. In consequence, Murphy's despicable representation of Fielding was purveyed to great numbers of readers who lacked either the opportunity or the inclination to turn to the works themselves. On the other hand, Baker's assertion that *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* were "well known" and "justly admired"¹⁸ was soon a commonplace in various reference books. "Well known" they undoubtedly were, and admirers steadily increased in number; but in 1762 their author had not yet received to any marked degree the public approval of the leading spirits of the age. Had Murphy been able to flatter other eminent persons beside Warburton by including *their dicta* about Fielding, we may be quite sure that he would have done so.

¹⁸ Baker, D. E., *The Companion to the Play-House*, London, 1764. Continuations were by Isaac Reed, 1782, and Stephen Jones, 1812.

CHAPTER VIII

The Turning of the Tide

1762-1772

DESPITE the fact that Murphy's unfortunate account of Fielding's life was fixed for good and all in so commanding a position, the handsome (though very incomplete) edition which he gave to the public was no doubt influential in gaining for the novelist a higher standing in the world of letters. It is true that the Fielding of the "Essay"—different from what he really was—became a traditional figure upon whom was fathered from time to time some new foundling story of improvidence and impecuniosity; but meanwhile the great books, appropriately clothed, were able to speak for themselves. And as one of the principal causes of delay in the understanding of Fielding was the activity and bitterness of his enemies, this cause, as time went on, became less operative. Notwithstanding the great vogue of Sterne, Fielding's novels vied with those of Richardson in demand among imitators; while to the playwrights on both sides of the water they furnished themes for dramatic and operatic adaptation. The decade following the appearance of Murphy's edition was, therefore, a period of quickening interest in Fielding; and though this interest sometimes expressed itself in ways detrimental to a true understanding of his works, it doubtless played a contributory part in the better appreciation to come.

In the opinion of Joseph Texte, the metamorphosis of *Tom Jones* into comic operas was instrumental in bringing about in France a depreciation of the seriousness of the author's purpose. This was no doubt the case; assuredly it was so in England, although there is another side to the story. By far the best of the dramatic adaptations of *Tom Jones* was Colman's *Jealous Wife* (1761). Unquestionably it was most successful; even Murphy admits that "the play met with applause," while

Peake, in his *Memoirs*, declares that it "established Colman's dramatic fame" and was "the most popular piece of its epoch."¹ According to Davies, who reports that Colman "was greatly commended" for his play, that "part of the fable which was borrowed from Tom Jones was certainly not the best" part "of the comedy; for 'Squire Russet was but a faint copy of that inimitable rustic brute Western"; and Lady Belaston, "a richer picture of profligacy in high life than Lady Freelove."² In Murphy's opinion Colman's dramatization of *Tom Jones* had "demonstrated" that the characters and incidents of the novel lose "much of their comic force and beauty, when attempted to be realized to us on the stage." This is putting it mildly; in every one of the dramatic versions of Fielding's books the artistic significance almost entirely disappeared—a fact especially true of the various comic operas. Not only the novelists, as has been seen, but the dramatists as well, by ignoring the serious purpose of their "facetious master" aided in emphasizing the view, which had always been prevalent, that Fielding was a mere entertainer. Still, the frequent adaptations of his works during this period must be regarded as both a factor in, and an indication of, the author's increasing fame.

Unlike many of those who borrowed materials from Fielding, Colman freely acknowledged his indebtedness. "The use that has been made in this comedy of Fielding's admirable novel of Tom Jones," runs the advertisement to *The Jealous Wife*, "must be obvious to the most ordinary reader."³ In the prologue, written by Lloyd and spoken by Garrick, the original of the play is referred to as "what a master's happy pencil drew";⁴ and in the following verses, first printed in *The*

¹ Peake, R. B., *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, London, 1841, I, 64.

² Davies, T., *Memoirs of . . . David Garrick*, third ed., London, 1781, I, 330.

³ *The Dramatick Works of George Colman*, London, 1777, I, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 9. In his satire entitled *Expostulation*, Murphy, unfriendly toward Colman, thus scores *The Jealous Wife* and its author:

"From *Fielding's* page raise contributions due,

And classically drunk—sing, 'I love Sue.'"—*The Examiner*, London, 1761, p. 12.

St. James's Magazine (May, 1763), Lloyd, in his "Cobler of Cripplegate's Letter," again alludes to Colman's indebtedness:

And Colman too, that little sinner,
That Essay-weaver, Drama-spinner . . .
Inform him, Lloyd, for all his grin
That Harry Fielding holds his chin.⁵

To Lloyd, "the late inimitable Henry Fielding" was the master of satiric comedy; to be named in the same breath with Rabelais and Swift, but kindlier than they:

Those giant sons of RIDICULE,
SWIFT, RAB'LAIS, and that favourite child,
Who, less eccentrically wild,
Inverts the misanthropic plan,
And, hating vices, hates not man:
How I do love thy gibing vein!
Which glances at the mimic train
Of sots, who proud as modern beaux
Of birth-day suits and tinsel clothes,
Affecting cynical grimace
With philosophic stupid face,
In dirty hue, with naked feet,
In rags and tatters, stroll the street.⁶

Colman himself, a fellow student of life and of the classics, was never weary of referring to Fielding; he was, indeed, one of the novelist's most intelligent and devoted admirers.⁷

Three years or so after the appearance of *The Jealous Wife*, Antoine Alexandre Poinsinet transformed *Tom Jones* into a *comédie lyrique*, the music for which was written by A. D. Philidor. According to Waldschmidt this comedy was first performed at Versailles on March 30, 1764; at any rate, its first appearance in Paris was on February 27, 1765, at the Comédie Italienne. Revised during the following year, it en-

⁵ Colman's *Prose on Several Occasions*, London, 1787, II, 303-304.

⁶ Anderson's *Works of the British Poets*, London, 1795, X, 676.

⁷ Colman's *Prose on Several Occasions*, I, 94; II, 6, 27, 90, 245; etc.

joyed a long-continued success; even Walpole, who saw it in 1766, admitted that the piece was popular. As full accounts of the production are at hand,⁸ nothing more need be said here except that whatever undoubted excellences this sparkling lyric comedy may have, its character is necessarily very different from that of *Tom Jones*. The discrepancy was noted at the time by a writer in the *Journal Encyclopédique*, who denounced the opera for the very reason that it bore no resemblance to its celebrated original.⁹ Squire Western's spirited hunting song ends with this jubilant Gallic stanza:

L'animal forcé succombe,
Fait un effort, se relève, enfin tombe.
Et nos chasseurs chantent tous à l'envi:
"Amis, goûtons les fruits de la victoire;
Amis, Amis, célébrons notre gloire.
Halali, Fanfare, Halali
Halali."

In the same year (1765) that Poinciset's opera started on its career in Paris, a play in German based on *Tom Jones* was written by a certain J. H. Steffens;¹⁰ and two years later there was performed at Vienna another German *Tom Jones* by Franz von Heufeld.¹¹ But what relates to our present purpose more closely is the comic opera which made its appearance in English. Though this production—Joseph Reed's *Tom Jones, a Comic Opera*—was not presented until January 14, 1769 (and printed during the same year), the author takes pains to say in his preface that the last act was written "in June 1765"; as a matter of fact, however, having adapted several of Poinciset's songs, he was forced to concede that he had been influenced somewhat by the French version. How re-

⁸ Waldschmidt, Carl, *Die Dramatisierungen von Fielding's Tom Jones*, Wetzlar, 1906, pp. 29-46.

⁹ *Journal Encyclopédique*, April 15, 1765, pp. 127-134.

¹⁰ *Thomas Jones, ein Lustspiel . . . nach der Grundlage des Herrn Fielding*, Zelle, 1765.

¹¹ *Tom Jones. Ein Lustspiel . . . nach dem Englischen Roman*, Wien, 1767. See Waldschmidt, pp. 57-68.

motely he followed the novel itself may be judged from certain admissions in his own preface. Regarding *Tom Jones* as "so replete with wit, humour, and character, that it can never want admirers while the English language remains," Reed says: "My extreme veneration for the memory of the truly-witty and ingenious novelist, naturally led me to *preserve* as much of FIELDING throughout my Opera, as the nature of my plan would allow"; yet he confesses he has introduced "many material deviations from the novel, both in point of fable, and character." He has, for example, "stripp'd its hero of his libertinism," in order to make him, as he imagines, "more amiable and interesting"; he has "metamorphos'd Parson *Supple* into a country 'squire, to avoid giving offense to the *cloth*"; he has "divested" Western of his "Jacobitism," and both Western and Honour "of their provinciality," and, "in conformity to the refined taste of the present age," endeavored "to purge Western's character of its coarseness and indelicacy"; finally, he has "availed" himself of M. Poinset's "hint of *legitimizing Jones*."¹² Imagine how such a rehabilitation of Fielding's novel must have operated against an appreciation of that author's seriousness of purpose! A writer in *The London Magazine*, who signs himself "Impartialis," declares in the course of a long article on Reed's opera that it will "ever remain a matter of the highest astonishment" that "the utmost *ingenuity of ignorance*" could "render so sensible a novel, so contemptible." The character of *Tom Jones*, he observes, "has ill-exchanged a thousand amiable qualifications for legitimacy."¹³

As time went on, other plays beside those mentioned made their appearance. In addition to the opera by Reed there was, in the year 1769, Cumberland's sentimental comedy *The*

¹² Reed, J., *Tom Jones, a Comic Opera*, second ed., London, 1769, Preface.

¹³ *The London Magazine*, XXXVIII, 3-8 (January, 1769). The editor too is of the same opinion: "This piece is fabricated . . . very poorly from the celebrated novel of the same name," whose "materials are universally allowed to be excellent." See pp. 42-43.

Brothers, the theme of which was suggested by *Tom Jones*. In 1773, Fielding's old enemy, William Kenrick, notwithstanding his scurrilous treatment of *Amelia* during the Newspaper War twenty years before, endeavored to turn that book to account in his *Duellist*, which appeared only to be hissed off the stage. According to *The Monthly Review*,¹⁴ "Had Dr. K. trusted more to his own strength," had "he not leaned upon Henry Fielding, it is probable he had not fallen." In 1778 (April 20), "Joseph Andrews. A Farce" (never published), by Samuel Jackson Pratt, was performed for Mr. Bensley's benefit at Drury-Lane.¹⁵ It is unnecessary to go into further detail regarding these dramatizations; but it should be remarked in passing that Sheridan on several occasions made use not only of Fielding's plays but also of his novels. Mrs. Malaprop of *The Rivals* (1775) is another Mrs. Slipslop—with a difference; and two years later, one of the most ingenious incidents in *Tom Jones* was made to do duty in another play. "Did ever poet, dramatist, or novel-writer," asks Samuel Rogers, "devise a more effective incident than the falling of the rug in Molly Seagrim's bedroom? Can any thing be more happily ludicrous, when we consider how the actors in that scene are connected with each other? It probably suggested to Sheridan the falling of the screen in 'The School for Scandal.'"¹⁶ But Sheridan's best-known borrowing was the reminiscence of Blifil and Jones in Joseph and Charles Surface, a parallelism which was remarked upon by a writer in *The London Chronicle*, at the first appearance¹⁷ of that famous comedy. On the whole, the use generally made by dramatists of materials from Fielding's novels operated in a twofold way: it increased his fame, but it gave a distorted impression of his genius. From the dramatic versions, the farces and light operas, no one could conceive of Fielding as anything but a

¹⁴ *The Monthly Review*, XLIX, 396 (November, 1773).

¹⁵ Baker, *Biographia Dramatica*, new ed., Dublin, 1782, I, 361.

¹⁶ *Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers*, edited by Dyce, 1887, p. 230.

¹⁷ *The London Chronicle*, May 8-10, 1777.

mere entertainer; every feature of the Censor of Britain, of the serious critic of life, had been eradicated.

Leaving the greenroom for the bookstall, we find Fielding's influence potent, though, as usual, the features imitated are the merely extrinsic ones. In spite of the great popularity of Sterne, Richardson and Fielding shared the honors between them; according to *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1769, *The History and Adventures of Arthur O'Bradley* is a "very uninteresting story, attempted in the manner of Fielding,"¹⁸ while the *Mistakes of the Heart* is a "very inferior" imitation of Richardson.¹⁹ As time went on, however, and sentimental fiction neared its apogee in such a production as Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771), Richardson's influence was the stronger. In Henry Brooke's *Fool of Quality* (1766-1770), the impress of Richardson, according to Mr. Dobson, is apparent; yet the author's use of the invocation and of the interpolated essay suggests an acquaintance with the works of Richardson's rival—it is no mere accident that several of the characters bear the family name of "Fielding." Whether a writer should use the comic-prose-epic form or that of letters was still an open question. In *The Adventures of an Author*²⁰ (1767), for example, mention is made of "The nominal chapter—short, sweet, and pithy" by Hercules Vinegar. But in general the press was flooded with such productions as the *Letters between Mrs. Villars and her Family* (1769), in which, by the way, there is the following passage on Fielding: "Last Sunday after church," writes one of the characters, "I desired Miss Villars to read to me, and put a volume of *Tom Jones* into her hand. She blushed, hesitated, but at last begged I would chuse some book more proper for the day." Later on, a reference is made to Mrs. Villars's habit of placing the best novels and other books where her children could read them and so become accustomed to good literature. Frederick, the boy, "made choice of Fielding's works," which he "read with

¹⁸ Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXXIX, 261.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Vol. I, ch. iv, pp. 26, 27.

eagerness"; Flavia "was charmed" with the "pathetick Richardson."²¹ It is only fair to say that Miss Villars's "blush" seems to have been occasioned not by the nature of the story but by the fact that it was her custom to read religious rather than secular books on Sunday. Thus, while the *Letters between Mrs. Villars and her Family* was Richardsonian in form, the author realized the market value of an extended reference to the popular Fielding; it was well to be on the safe side. This procedure had long been a popular one; in the *Letters between Henry and Frances* by Elizabeth and Richard Griffith (the first edition appeared in 1757 and the third in 1767)—a book for which Dr. Johnson was one of the subscribers and which Fanny Burney enjoyed reading in her girlhood—there is the following passage by "Henry" concerning *Tom Jones*: "[This novel] is a true copy of human life; the characters thoroughly kept up to; the story well told; the incidents humorous; the sentiments noble; and the reflections just and moral. The only fault I find with the author is, the ill-judged attempts he often makes to be witty; which being by no means his talent, and, in a work of this kind, wholly unnecessary; he is therefore inexcusable, if it should turn out, as it frequently does here, in poor allusions, bald conceits, or wretched puns."²² This passage on Fielding is another instance of the use which was made of his popularity; but the final sentences have a real significance. It was difficult for the reading world to understand how a really great writer could wear his earnestness so lightly. The youthful Fanny Burney, it will be remembered, on reading *The Vicar of Wakefield* was at first inclined to rate the "elegant" letters of Henry and Frances above the commonplace simplicity of Goldsmith, though before she had finished the Vicar's story she was reduced to tears.

For an interesting comment upon the state of affairs in

²¹ *The Exemplary Mother: or, Letters between Mrs. Villars and her Family*, Dublin, 1769, I, 11, 14.

²² *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances*, third ed., London, 1767, I, 153 (letter CXI). First edition listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXVII, 191 (April, 1757).

1770 we may refer to one Charles Jenner, who, in *The Placid Man: or, Memoirs of Sir Charles Beville*, writes in favor of "introductory chapters," and does "not decline following" Fielding's "steps through the most difficult part of his method." "The ingenious Mr. Henry Fielding," he says, "whose memory ought to be as dear to every novel-writer, as his Authority ought to be respectable, has declared these introductory chapters . . . to be essentially necessary to this species of writing. It is therefore with infinite concern that I see my brethren in this trade fly in the face of an authority so sacred, and venture to thrust their crude productions into the world . . . without a preface, introduction, [or] address to the reader."²³ Though he is aware "the generality of them will plead . . . that by throwing their materials into the form of letters, they confess themselves, disciples of Mr. Richardson, and so, in imitation of their master, have a right to begin in the middle of their history, without ceremony open half a dozen characters upon you at once, and leave you to find out who they are if you can," he believes that Mr. Fielding has "put the utility" of initial chapters beyond "all manner of doubt." In his opinion the reason that the "generality of modern novelists choose to slight this institution" is because they are conscious of their own inability. In Volume II, there is an "Apology for Novel-readers," in which he speaks again of the "neglect" of "these introductory chapters." Throughout Jenner's interpolated essays, Fielding's ideas are freely paraphrased: the "invention" of a fiction-writer should mean "the discoveries which he has been able to make of the manners of mankind, by the help of observation and reflection";²⁴ the requirements for his success should be "materials" drawn from life, "observation," "genius," "reading and understanding," and, finally, "taste";²⁵ his structure should follow that of the

²³ *The Placid Man: or, Memoirs of Sir Charles Beville*, London, 1770, Vol. I, book ii, ch. i, pp. 71-76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, book ii, ch. i, pp. 76-77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, book ii, ch. i, p. 77.

drama, "whereof novels are only a more diffuse species";²⁶ he should avoid the "perfect character" as not "the properest to excite emulation"; and, keeping within the bounds of possibility, he should reject the "marvellous," which serves "only to fill the heads of young people with romantic notions and wild ideas."²⁷

A more notable follower in Fielding's footsteps was the Rev. Richard Graves, who, thirty years before, as has been said, recommended *Joseph Andrews* to the notice of Shenstone. According to the preface of *The Spiritual Quixote* (1772), which, by the way, is put in the mouth of a clergyman, "Don Quixote or Gil Blas, Clarissa or Sir Charles Grandison, will furnish more hints for correcting the follies and regulating the morals of young persons . . . than volumes of severe precepts seriously delivered and dogmatically enforced."²⁸ Not a word about Fielding is to be found in the preface, though it is obvious that Graves is imitating that author's type of novel rather than Richardson's. Calling his own work an "epopeia" (I, preface, p. ix), he makes use of the interpolated essay (I, ch. iv, "An Essay on Quixotism"; I, ch. xi, a "Panegyric on Esquires") and the inserted story ("Miss Townsend's narration," I, book iii, ch. vi ff., pp. 139-179); draws upon Parson Adams, apparently, for his character of Wildgoose; and, in such passages as that in which "Mrs. Booby" [Was this a reminiscence of Fielding's Lady Booby?]—viewing from the window the prepossessing person of her Casuist, "as he was de-claiming"—fancies she has "occasion for some ghostly advice,"²⁹ comes somewhat near the spirit of Fielding himself. Before we finish reading this anti-Methodist production, we find in the first chapter of the third book the following jibe at *Tom Jones* on the part of the landlady, Mrs. Whitefield. Looking with disfavor upon her two "dusty" travelers,

²⁶ *The Placid Man*, Vol. II, book iv, ch. i, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, book vi, ch. i, pp. 173, 175.

²⁸ *The Spiritual Quixote*, London, 1773, I, vi.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1773, Vol. I, book v, ch. vii, p. 285.

" 'Hey-day!' quoth she, 'lodgings, indeed! yes, to be sure; because Squire Fielding, forsooth, in that romancing book of his, pretends that Tom Jones was harboured here, we shall be pestered with all the tramps that pass the road.' " ³⁰

Jenner was probably right when he said in 1770 that the fashion of introductory chapters was on the wane and that the majority of writers were using Richardson as a model. Certainly this was the case during the following two decades, when the main staple of the circulating libraries was the trashy sentimental tale, commonly in the form of letters. Nevertheless, the fame of Fielding, as we may judge from dramatic adaptations of his books, from allusions to him in the fiction of the day, from the value which foreign publishers set upon his name, ³¹ and from the demand for reissues not only of the novels separately but of the collected *Works*, was expanding and deepening. The following list of editions between the years 1762-1775, as given in Professor Cross's biography, may be allowed to speak for itself. Of the *Works* there were: 1st ed., 4 vols., London, 1762; the so-called second edition, 8 vols., London, 1762; 3d ed., London, 1766; 4th ed., Edinburgh, 1767; London, 1769; Edinburgh, 1771; London, 1771, 8 vols.; London, 1771, 12 vols.; London, Strahan, 1775, 12 vols.; London, Bell, 1775, 12 vols. ³²—Of *Tom Jones*: En France, 1762; Amsterdam, 1763; 5th ed., London, 1763; Berlin, 1764; Dresden, 1764; Paris, 1764; Westeras, 1765; 6th ed., London, 1765; Dublin, 1766; Dublin, 1767; Paris, 1767; Edinburgh, 1767; 7th ed., London, 1768; Paris, 1770; St. Petersburg, 1770-1771; Edinburgh, 1771; Leipzig, 1771; Hamburg, 1771; London, 1773; Dresden, 1773;

³⁰ *The Spiritual Quixote*, Vol. I, book iii, ch. i, pp. 119-120.

³¹ By attributing various productions to him; e.g., *Die Geraubte Einsiedlerin, oder Ophelia, aus dem Englischen des Herrn Fielding*, Berlin, 1767. In Germany, according to A. Wood's *Einfluss Fieldings* (p. 18), the works of Sarah Fielding were commonly attributed to Henry; see also *Mémoires du Chevalier de Kilpar . . . de M. Fielding*, Paris, 1768.

³² Cross's *Fielding*, III, 329.

London, 1774; Dresden, 1774; Edinburgh, 1774; Paisley, 1775; Paris, 1775.⁸³—Of *Joseph Andrews*: 6th ed., London, 1762; Amsterdam, 1764; Berlin, 1765; 8th ed., London, 1768; 9th ed., London, 1769; Edinburgh, 1770; Berlin, 1770; Amsterdam, 1775.⁸⁴—And of *Amelia*: Paris, 1762; 3d ed., Frankfurth, 1763; Paris, 1763; Frankfurth, 1764; Frankfurth, 1768; Paris, 1772; London, 1775.⁸⁵ This tells the story—or, at least, an important part of it—of the turning of the tide during the decade or so after the appearance of Murphy's edition of the collected *Works*.

Walpole, as we have remarked, on his visit to Paris in 1765, found that the novels of Richardson had "stupefied the whole French nation." In the face of excellent evidence, it would be difficult to disprove this statement, nor is it necessary to try to do so. In 1767 Rousseau was still exclaiming (to the Marquis de Mirabeau), "How natural his [Richardson's] situations are . . . how true his portraits . . .!"⁸⁶ And in 1773 Sébastien Mercier, in his "Essai sur l'Art Dramatique," declared that *Clarissa* and *Grandison* were "poems to which antiquity can produce no worthy rival"; while at the end of the century Chénier, in his "Élégie XIV," thus apostrophized Richardson's heroine: "Clarissa! with Heaven itself radiant in your saintly beauty . . . your sweet likeness hastens to fill my fairest dreams!"⁸⁷ Unquestionably it was Richardson rather than Fielding who was honored by the most eminent during that century with the more enthusiastic eulogy in print. Yet from the list of editions just given it is obvious that Fielding's novels were finding in the 'Sixties and the 'Seventies a ready sale in France. There are indications, also, that as time went on his works were better understood than they had been at first.

⁸³ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 317-318.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 306.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 322.

⁸⁶ Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, 1909, XII, 13.

⁸⁷ *Poésies*, Paris, 1888, p. 99. Chénier admired the plot of *Tom Jones*; but Richardson was "ce grand peintre de mœurs, le plus vrai qu'ait eu l'Angleterre."—*Œuvres Posthumes*, III, 248, 208.

Joseph Texte was right, no doubt, when he asserted that Fielding was never fully appreciated in France; too often the view taken of him was that of his own translator, Madame Riccoboni; namely, that he was deficient in taste and elegance. In a letter to Garrick, January 29, 1767, she wrote as follows: "Ce que vous appelez *humour* n'est pas rendu par le mot goût; Fielding, Swift, ont ce *humour*, mais rarement du goût. Mettre tout à sa place, dire ce qu'il faut, ne jamais s'écarter de la vérité, suivre la nature et ne pas l'outrer, voilà le goût"³⁸—which puts us in mind of Walpole's constant affirmation that Fielding was perpetually lacking in "grace" and taste. But even across the Channel a change in attitude was now becoming perceptible. Walpole himself was put to his trumps when he attacked *Tom Jones* in his letters to Mme. du Defand; and that celebrated lady had the satisfaction of witnessing a change of heart in the great Voltaire himself. Though—years before—he had praised Fielding's adaptation of *L'Avare*, in 1759 (October 13), writing to Mme. du Defand, Voltaire could discover he said, "rien de passable" in *Tom Jones* except "le caractère d'un barbier."³⁹ By May 30, 1764, he had grown more moderate: Fielding's novels please, he wrote, because they have "de la vérité et de la gaieté."⁴⁰ How Mme. du Deffand championed their author against Walpole will be told in the next chapter.

Eulogies of Fielding and his novels occupying conspicuous places in books and periodicals of the day were still far from numerous. In October, 1770, however, *The Gentleman's Magazine*⁴¹ excerpted a commendatory passage from *La Jolie Femme*, by the poet and novelist Nicolas T. Barthe (1734-

³⁸ *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, London, 1832, II, 509. Mme. Riccoboni's translation, or rather paraphrase, of *Amelia* appeared in 1762.

³⁹ Voltaire's *Œuvres Complètes*, nouvelle édition, Paris, 1879, XL, 190. For *L'Avare*, see XXIII, 115.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XXV, 182.

⁴¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XL, 454-456.

1785), who is known in biographical dictionaries as the author of an epistle "On Genius considered in its Relation to the Fine Arts." The extract is accompanied by such sputtering footnotes on the part of the "Editor" of the *Gentleman's* that one wonders why he ever allowed it a place in his columns; probably it was because eulogy of Richardson, too good to lose, was inextricably bound up with an estimate of Fielding.

After interrupting the "unhappy Clarissa" to "mix" his "tears with hers" and after telling us that Grandison is "the book which most inspires virtue, Plutarch and Plato not excepted," Barthe turns to Fielding, who "may justly be styled his [Richardson's] rival," and says some very handsome things: "No man in the world (without excepting Molière) was better acquainted with the shades which diversify characters; and he is the Author who has best seized the manners of the people. . . . A living picture animated with its caprices, its passions, its follies; a true, singular pencil; a simple, lively moral, which naturally results from various scenes; all this insures to Fielding a distinguished place among those Writers whose fertile imagination has drawn Nature as she really is. Less sublime, less pathetic than Richardson, but more chearful, more original [The reviewer breaks in with, "This will scarce be allowed by the admirers of Richardson, nor does it seem true."], he engages us as much as the other makes us weep. If the one has opened all the treasures of morality, the other, with a wise economy, has insinuated it with an imperceptible art into the soul. . . . The one paints with large strokes, attracts the heart on every side, and imperiously hurries it away; the other by varied, chosen, delicate touches, brings smiles on the lips, and tears into the eyes. Indeed he soon dries them; but this transition is so managed as not to be abrupt. His style has the same effect as that ancient music, whose art made the soul pass gently, or, as it were, insensibly, from joy to sorrow; thus producing various and even opposite emotions. In short, Richardson is more grand, more formed on models which will live throughout all ages; the other is more simple, more instructive

[Again the reviewer says, "This too will not be allowed."], and his admirers being less idolatious [*sic*] he will have, perhaps, a still greater number of readers."

Protest as he might, the editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine* could not help being aware of the evidence of Fielding's increasing vogue. If he glanced through the satirical verse of the hour his eye would rest perhaps upon such a reference as the following:

Now, muse, if after all that's said
You love 'em [*i.e.*, the Scotch]; be it on your head.
But never blush to own your yielding
To Garth and since to Harry Fielding.⁴²

If he picked up a chap-book in the stalls it might have for a title-page:

THE HUMOROUS AND DIVERTING HISTORY OF
TOM JONES, A FOUNDLING: CONTAINING . . . THE
HUMOURS OF SQUIRE WESTERN, The Famous FOX-
HUNTER; And the droll and whimsical Adventures which befell
Honest PARTRIDGE . . . Interspersed with many curious Love-
Particulars Between Mr. JONES AND THE Beautiful Miss SO-
PHIA WESTERN.⁴³

If he looked at the new book of travels by Philip Thicknesse, the *Useful Hints to those who make the Tour of France*, he would find that the author "could tell you many stories" of the eccentric rector of the royal hospital at St. Germain "which would do honour to *Parson Adams*."⁴⁴ If, turning to more serious reading, he dipped into Dr. Burn's *History of the Poor*

⁴² Included in *A Collection of Scarce, Curious, and Valuable Pieces . . . from the . . . Most Eminent Wits of the Present Age*, Edinburgh, 1785, pp. 5-6. Listed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XL, 192 (April, 1770).

⁴³ The second ed., London, *n.d.* Printed for R. Snagg (*ca.* 1770).

⁴⁴ *Useful Hints to those who make the Tour of France . . . by Philip Thicknesse*, London, 1768, letter IX, p. 105.

Laws, he would find praise not only of the subject matter of Fielding's *Proposal* but of "that strong sense and energy of expression, of which that author was happily possessed."⁴⁵ Or, if he examined a recent installment of *The Letters of Junius*, he might run across the following query: "Is the union of *Blifil* and *Black George* no longer a romance?"⁴⁶ and would infer from this allusion that, with the general reader, the fictitious Blifil and Black George stood as little in need of annotation as the living persons whom they represented. No wonder the reviewer for *The Gentleman's Magazine* considered it necessary to warn his readers against M. Barthe's extravagant praise of Richardson's competitor.

The fact is that the great novelist's works, released from the jeopardy of personal malice against the author, were being at last more often judged upon their literary merits. A clear indication of this change of attitude is to be observed in the procedure of Fielding's ancient enemy, Tobias Smollett, who, in the *Continuation* (1766) of his *History of England*, endeavored to make amends for past iniquities. "The genius of Cervantes," he wrote, "was transfused into the novels of Fielding, who painted the characters and ridiculed the follies of the age with equal strength, humour, and propriety."⁴⁷ It is such a far cry from the scurrilous *Habbakkuk Hilding* to this just and elegant compliment that one is tempted to lend an attentive ear to the following well-known bit of history. According to Walter Scott, Smollett was often accused by his contemporaries of "literary envy"; certainly this was true in the case of Churchill, who, several years before this tribute to Fielding appeared, had kept the story of Smollett's jealousy in circulation by thus attacking him in his *Apology* (1761):

⁴⁵ Burn, Richard, *The History of the Poor Laws*, London, 1764, p. 196.

⁴⁶ *The Letters of Junius*, edited by John Wade, London, 1850, I, 402 (letter LVII, September 28, 1771).

⁴⁷ *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, London, 1766, II, 160.

For let me hoary FIELDING bite the ground
 So nobler PICKLE stands superbly bound;
 From LIVY'S temples tear th' historic crown
 Which with more justice blooms upon thine own.
 Compar'd with thee, be all life-writers dumb,
 But he who wrote the Life of TOMMY THUMB.⁴⁸

In his satire *The Ghost* (Book II, published 1762), Churchill again alludes to Fielding's fame as a novelist when he pictures, among a group of departed authors,

BIOGRAPHERS, whose wond'rous worth
 Is scarce remember'd now on earth,
 Whom FIELDING'S *humour* led astray,
 And *plaintive* FOPS, debauch'd by GRAY.⁴⁹

Whether Smollett's praise of Fielding was influenced by these thrusts of Churchill's or whether it was instigated more by honor than by shrewdness, its inclusion in the *History of England* implies that the author of *Tom Jones* was now attaining in the world of letters a higher position than had been accorded him during his lifetime.

In the decade after the appearance of Murphy's edition, Fielding's fortunes, then, were growing brighter; yet, as we compare his fame with that of Richardson, we realize that he had not yet succeeded in wresting the palm from that popular moralist and sentimentalist. What did Smollett say of Richardson in his *History*? Did he not paraphrase Johnson's famous *dictum* and declare that Richardson had enlisted "the passions on the side of virtue"? Did he not say that Richardson's "knowledge and command of human nature" were "amazing," and that his "system of ethics" was "sublime"? Thus not only as a delineator of human nature but as a "sublime" moralist the author of *Clarissa* and of *Grandison* had scored again; nor was this instance at all uncommon. Everyone has heard that *Pamela* was recommended from the pulpit by the

⁴⁸ *The Apology*, London, 1761, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Churchill, C., *Poems*, London, 1763, p. 210 (*The Ghost*, Book II).

Rev. Benjamin Slocock; but is it generally known that, twenty-five years later, the Rev. James Fordyce, that popular preacher, in his extraordinarily popular *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) singled out for commendation "the beautiful productions" of the "incomparable pen" of Richardson? Is it generally known that Fordyce, quoting (or rather misquoting) that "indisputable judge" of literature, Dr. Samuel Johnson, who "taught the passions to move at the command of reason [*sic*]," declared that Richardson had put the female "sex under singular obligations"? And what did the reverend gentleman say of Fielding? Not once, in this publication, did Fordyce mention him by name; but there can be little doubt of his opinion. *Tom Jones* was to be found, presumably, among "certain books, which we are assured (for we have not read them) are in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous, and which contain such rank treason against the royalty of virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute, let her reputation in life be what it will . . . say, ye chaste stars, that with innumerable eyes inspect the midnight behaviour of mortals—can it be true, that any young woman, pretending to decency, should endure for a moment to look on this infernal brood of futility and lewdness?"⁵⁰ It was very difficult for Henry Fielding "of facetious memory" to dislodge a rival so deeply intrenched behind a "sublime system of ethics"; yet had he lived but seven years longer and been knighted—as his brother John was—the task, no doubt, would have been easier.

⁵⁰ Fordyce, James, *Sermons to Young Women*, sixth ed., London, 1766, I, 71-72 (Sermon IV).

CHAPTER IX

Scholarly Recognition

1772-1784

I

Dr. Johnson and the Burney Circle

DURING his lifetime, Fielding's most continuously active enemy among literary persons was his rival Richardson. A careful examination of the evidence shows clearly that the author of *Pamela* exerted every effort to promulgate the idea not only that Fielding's books were "wretchedly low and dirty" but that their author was a man of vicious "principles." This abuse on the part of a fellow novelist did more actual injury than has ordinarily been imagined. In the first place, Richardson's position was a somewhat commanding one: even before his death literary pilgrims came to worship at his shrine; moreover, among contemporaries, his pious posture and his shakings of the head, taken in conjunction with his paternal intimacy with Fielding's sister Sally (who was proud to be one of his "daughters") must have forestalled for the most part the suspicion of his true animus. At last (in 1761), Richardson died; but he was survived for nearly a quarter of a century by the foremost of his ardent propagandists, the most brilliant talker and greatest man of letters of the age, the most famous of all English literary dictators—Samuel Johnson.

In 1764, three years after Richardson's death, the celebrated literary "Club" was formed, which during Johnson's lifetime included among its members Reynolds, Johnson, Goldsmith, Hawkins, Garrick, Murphy, Joseph Warton, Colman the Elder, Fox, Sheridan, Dr. Burney, and Gibbon. From all of these we have expressions of opinion concerning Henry Fielding that will be, in the course of this history, considered. At the home of the Thrales and elsewhere Johnson had met be-

fore his death nearly all the literary people of England who were not members of the Literary Club. From 1764 until his death (1784), he was the acknowledged king of the world of letters; and, as we have observed, long before he had attained to this position he had made up his mind about Henry Fielding. Very early, it would seem, he silently and effectually opposed that author in *The Gentleman's Magazine*; by 1756, presumably, he was using his "clock-work" comparison; and now, during the entire twenty years of his reign, he openly denounced Fielding and eulogized his rival.

Few writers have found in the literary dictator of their century so strong and indefatigable a champion as Richardson was blessed with in the person of Samuel Johnson. Wherever the Great Cham went, to new acquaintances as well as old, he sang his friend's praises. "The first time I was in company with Dr. Johnson," writes Miss Reynolds, "which was at Miss Cotteril's, I well remember the flattering notice he took of a lady present, on her saying that she was inclined to estimate the morality of every person according as they liked or disliked *Clarissa Harlowe*. He was a great admirer of Richardson's works in general, but of *Clarissa* he always spoke with the highest enthusiastic praise. He used to say that it was the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human heart."¹ The Richardsonian Miss Seward, who was certainly no friend of Johnson's, wrote in 1786, "The late Dr. Johnson, amidst his too frequent injustice to authors, and general parsimony of praise, uniformly asserted [*Clarissa*] to be not only the first novel, but that perhaps it was the first work in the English language."² That splendid phrase of his about teaching the passions to move at the command of virtue had been echoed and reëchoed, as we have seen, ever since it ap-

¹ *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, new ed., by J. W. Croker, New York, 1837, II, 491.

² *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LVI, 16 (January, 1786). Miss Seward refers to the article as hers in a letter of March 29, 1786; see *Letters of Anna Seward*, Edinburgh, 1811, I, 135.

peared, February 19, 1751, in the ninety-seventh *Rambler*; and now, in the days of Fanny Burney, he was still preaching *Clarissa* with unabated zeal. No doubt his denunciation of Fielding began as early; certainly it continued as late.

In expressing his admiration for the works of Richardson, Johnson was undoubtedly sincere. Nor is it difficult to imagine the reason for his preference; the author, in his eyes, was a profound moralist: he really had "taught the passions to move at the command of virtue," and he had, by his sentimental analysis, enlarged the "knowledge of human nature"—you must read the novels not for the story but for the "sentiment," he once said. Laudation of Richardson, however, was not sufficient for Johnson; he was equally indefatigable in his denunciation of Richardson's competitor. Why was it that he disparaged Fielding? This question, which has exercised the ingenuity of many pens, can hardly be answered with absolute certainty. It has been said that Johnson was opposed to Fielding politically: Fielding was a Whig, and according to the Doctor, the first Whig was the devil himself;³ but the generally accepted opinion as to why Johnson condemned Fielding seems to be that he was very deeply indebted to Richardson as a friend: when he was held for debt in a sponging-house, it was Richardson who bailed him out. The tone of his own account of the matter indicates apparently that he was at that time on excellent terms with the novelist, for he says: "[I] was so sure of my deliverance . . . that before his reply was brought I knew I could afford to joke with the rascal who had me in custody, and did so over a pint of adulterated wine, for which at that instant, I had no money to pay."⁴

Dr. Burney, several years after his great friend's death, con-

³ C. E. Vaughan (*English Literary Criticism*, London, 1896, p. lxiii) thinks Johnson was afraid of Fielding's self-reliant originality, inasmuch as *Tom Jones* dealt a blow at "the indispensable laws of Aristotelian criticism."

⁴ G. B. Hill's edition of *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Oxford, 1887, I, 304 note.

tributed to an edition of Boswell the following explanation: "Johnson's severity against Fielding did not arise from any viciousness in his style, but from his loose life, and the profligacy of almost all his male characters." And to support the Doctor in this attitude Burney asks, "Who would venture to read one of his [Fielding's] novels aloud to modest women? His novels are *male* amusements, and very amusing they certainly are." Dr. Burney tells us, furthermore, that "Fielding's conversation was coarse, and so tinctured with the rank weeds of *the garden* [Covent-Garden], that it would now be thought only fit for a brothel."⁵ But on this point Austin Dobson has a pertinent word to say. Citing the evidence given by one⁶ of Fielding's contemporaries, he observes, "Mrs. Hussey's testimony as to his [Fielding's] dignified and gentlemanly manners, which does not seem to be advanced to meet any particular charge, may surely be set against any innuendoes of the Burney and Walpole type as to his mean surroundings and coarse conversation."⁷ Where did Burney get his information regarding Fielding's loose life and immoral conversation? Possibly from other sources, for he was an organist in London in 1749; but presumably long afterwards from Johnson himself. As for reading Fielding aloud, it is to be noted that Dr. Burney could read *Pasquin* with his daughter Fanny in 1783. Moreover, when *Evelina* appeared, five years before that, he said it was the best novel he knew "excepting Fielding's"; for Smollett's novels were "so damned gross" that they were not "fit reading for women." He thus implied that Fielding's *were* fit reading for women. When Dr. Burney wrote the note for Boswell's *Johnson*, he was obviously taking advantage of the greater refinement which was growing popular at the end of the century in order to palliate Dr. Johnson's prejudice. To Boswell, who should have known more about the matter

⁵ Croker's edition of *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, New York, 1837, I, 292 note.

⁶ Smith, J. T., *Nollekens and his Times*, edited by W. Whitten, 1917, 104-106.

⁷ *Notes and Queries*, 6 S., VIII, 162 (September 1, 1883).

than anyone else, Johnson's disparagement of Fielding was inexplicable.

Whatever may have been the *causes* of his animus, the fact remains that Johnson eulogized Richardson and denounced Fielding wherever he happened to be. But though his missionary work in behalf of his friend among the members of the Literary Club was, in all likelihood, active from the beginning, the first specific utterance which has become a part of literary history was made, according to Boswell, during the spring of 1768.

"Sir," said Johnson to Boswell, "there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and *there* is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson. Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood, by a more superficial observer, than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart."⁸

Many a writer has cudgelled his brains in the effort to excuse or explain this *dictum*—Boswell, Hazlitt, Scott, and John Forster, among the older men of letters, and numerous critics of our own day. And yet the matter is sufficiently clear: Johnson does not use the word "manners" in the sense in which Gibbon used it later; what he means is that Fielding is "superficial." Hazlitt, who was very fond of Richardson, infers from the above criticism simply that Johnson preferred to actual truth the truth "of reflection." But to all except Richardsonians the rejoinder of Professor Saintsbury will seem to fit the case better. No one can say, he declares, "that Fielding is shallow because he does not choose to give us all his soundings; nor that Richardson is profound because he is always turning out the contents of his little drag-net on the demonstration table for exhibition."⁹

Taking up our *Boswell* again, we find Johnson, four years

⁸ G. B. Hill's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Oxford, 1887, II, 48-49.

⁹ *The Bookman* (London), XXXII, 7, 8 (April, 1907).

later (April 6, 1772) at Sir Alexander Macdonald's, calling Fielding a "blockhead," and explaining that what he means by a "blockhead" is "a barren rascal." As on the previous occasion, young Boswell remonstrates.

BOSWELL. 'Will you not allow, Sir, that he draws very natural pictures of human life?'

JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, it is of very low life. Richardson used to say, that had he not known who Fielding was, he should have believed he was an ostler. Sir, there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all Tom Jones. I, indeed, never read Joseph Andrews.' Then Erskine, who, like Boswell, must be regarded as representing the younger generation, enters his demurrer.

ERSKINE. 'Surely, Sir, Richardson is very tedious.'

JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment.'¹⁰ Nearly twenty years later, when Boswell published his *Life of Johnson*, he looked back in amazement at the Doctor's "excessive and unaccountable depreciation of one of the best writers that England has produced,"¹¹ and inserted in his great book an excellent defense of Fielding's art and ethics—but that belongs to a later chapter.

Meanwhile the foremost moral and critical authority of the age—as he was frequently called—conducted an energetic campaign for Samuel Richardson; surely no other English novelist has ever been blessed with so active and powerful a propagandist. Everyone knew who had "taught the passions to move at the command of virtue," and everyone knew who had made this great pronouncement. Nor did Johnson stop with this; in his life of Rowe (1781) he went out of his way to include, apropos of Lovelace, the following praise: "It was in the power of Richardson alone to teach us at once esteem and de-

¹⁰ Hill's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, II, 173, 174, 175.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 49.

testation; to make virtuous resentment overpower all the benevolence which wit, elegance, and courage naturally excite, and to lose at last the hero in the villain."¹²

Among those whom the Doctor seems to have influenced was the well-known moralist Hannah More; the following letter, written to her sister in 1780, is self-explanatory. "I never saw Johnson really angry with me but once," she says, "and his displeasure did him so much honour that I loved him the better for it. I alluded rather flippantly, I fear, to some witty passage in 'Tom Jones': he replied, 'I am shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book. I am sorry to hear you have read it; a confession which no modest lady should ever make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work.' I thanked him for his correction; assured him I thought full as ill of it now as he did, and had only read it at an age when I was more subject to be caught by the wit, than able to discern the mischief. Of Joseph Andrews I declared my decided abhorrence. He went so far as to refuse to Fielding the great talents which are ascribed to him, and broke out into a noble panegyric on his competitor Richardson; who, he said, was as superior to him in talents as in virtue, and whom he pronounced to be the greatest genius that had shed its lustre on this path of literature."¹³

It is sometimes said that Hannah More did not agree with Johnson in exalting Richardson above Fielding; but though in 1780 she may have taken his scolding with more deference than contrition it is clear that later in life (when, to use the words of a famous critic, she had become "encrusted with Calvinism") she was as good a Richardsonian and anti-Fieldingite as the Great Cham could have desired. Her attitude in 1799 toward the character of the author of *Tom Jones* may be inferred from a parenthetical remark of hers to the effect that the "late celebrated Henry Fielding" was "a man not

¹² Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*, edited by G. B. Hill, Oxford, 1905, II, 67.

¹³ Roberts, William, *Memoirs of . . . Hannah More*, New York, 1836, I, 101 (the preceding letter is dated "1780").

likely to be suspected of overstrictness."¹⁴ Her opinion in 1805 of Fielding's greatest novel is to be found among the "Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess." In this compendium, Miss More counsels every "young female" to read the *Oriental Queens* rather than *Tom Jones*, to the end that she may "not identify her feelings" with those of the characters, "as she too probably does in the case of Sophia Western." Romances, such as *Almorán and Hamet*, "innocently invigorate the fancy"; novels like *Tom Jones* "convey a contagious sickliness to the mind."¹⁵ Miss More's opinion of Richardson may be inferred from one of the speeches of Sir John Belfield, a character in her novel *Coelebs* (1808). Richardson, according to Sir John, possessed "deeper and juster views of human nature, a truer taste for the proprieties of female character, and a more exact intuition into real life than any other writer of fabulous narrative. . . . In no other writer of fictitious adventures has the triumph of religion and reason . . . been so successfully blended."¹⁶ That in 1819 Miss More was entirely in accord with Johnson's opinion is shown by the fact that in her arraignment of that "Unprofitable Reading" which had aided in relaxing the "general manners" of the times she commended the "old restraints" by instancing Dr. Johnson's talk with her years before. "The writer remembers to have heard Dr. Johnson reprove a young lady [Hannah More herself] in severe terms for quoting a sentiment from *Tom Jones*—a book, he said, which, if a modest lady had done so improper a thing as to read, she should not do so immodest a thing as to avow."¹⁷

In Mrs. Thrale, of course, Johnson found one of his strongest supporters. Her letter to him of November 11, 1778, shows

¹⁴ See her "Strictures on . . . Female Education," in *Works*, new ed., London, 1830, Vol. V, ch. viii, p. 141 note.

¹⁵ *The Works of Hannah More*, new ed., London, 1830, Vol. VI, ch. xxx, p. 336.

¹⁶ *Coelebs*, London, 1808, Vol. II, ch. xxxv, pp. 210-211.

¹⁷ See "Unprofitable Reading," in *Works of Hannah More*, new ed., London, 1830, IV, 337.

not only her own bias but the interest which, on account of the forthcoming production¹⁸ of Fielding's play *The Fathers*, was at this time taken in the merits of the rival novelists. "Burney shall bring you on the 26th," she writes, "so now we may talk of Richardson or Fielding, or of anything else but of coming home." In the course of her letter we meet with the following Johnsonian echo: "'Tis general nature [*i.e.*, "that letter in *Clarissa*"], not particular manners, that Richardson represents. Honest Joseph, and Pamela's old father and mother, are translatable, not like Fielding's fat landladies, who all speak the Wiltshire dialect." "But I dare not add another word on this subject," she concludes, "though you are a Richardsonian yourself."¹⁹ When, at last, death had compelled Johnson to withdraw from the fray, Mrs. Thrale (now Mrs. Piozzi) continued to do battle as before. In her *Anecdotes* (1786) she reports Johnson as saying that "Richardson had picked the kernel of life . . . while Fielding was contented with the husk";²⁰ and since the superficial author of *Tom Jones* obstinately refused to be extinguished during her lifetime (she lived until 1821), she wrote in her *Autobiography* that the book was "not yet obsolete."²¹ According to the forgotten laureate H. J. Pye, Mrs. Piozzi "exceeded every stretch of hyperbolic partiality, in preferring Richardson to Fielding as a painter of manners."²²

Still, in spite of Johnson and his adherents, of women and clergymen and male sentimentalists, Richardson, during the last quarter of the century, was losing rather than gaining in reputation. This may be inferred from the testimony of his well-wishers. Even Miss Carter, who composed at the time of

¹⁸ First performed November 30, 1778.

¹⁹ Piozzi, Hesther Lynch, *Letters to and from . . . Samuel Johnson*, London, 1788, II, 30, 31.

²⁰ Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, London, 1786, p. 198.

²¹ *Autobiography . . . of Mrs. Piozzi*, edited by A. Hayward, Boston, 1861, p. 178.

²² Pye, H. J., *Sketches on Various Subjects*, second ed., London, 1797, p. 196 note.

the novelist's death (in 1761) an ebullient epitaph, admits in 1775 that his works are not so greatly admired in England as in France. The "reason" for this, according to her letter to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, is "probably" not so much "from our being less accurate judges of the subject," as from the fact that Richardson's defects "in expression and manners, which are so very striking to ourselves, as to conceal much of his very great merit in other respects," are not so clearly perceived by those who "are not acquainted with our language, and our customs."²³ But the most notable confession was made by Mrs. Chapone, who as Miss Mulso, a generation before, had fought for her literary "father" tooth and nail. On a re-reading of *Pamela* (in which she still found "amazing genius"), she wrote, "It appeared to me somewhat different from what I thought of it thirty years ago."²⁴ Despite the fact that the sentimental trash which filled the *fin de siècle* public libraries was immediately or remotely related to the works of Richardson, its celebrated progenitor himself was losing with the younger generation some of that prestige which he had so long enjoyed. "You can't think with what scorn I listen to little misses, and very little masters," complained that inveterate Richardsonian, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, October 3, 1778, "who tell us in parrot phrase, 'Nobody reads Clarissa now. People now think it languid and tedious.'"²⁵ In Johnson's own "Club," Boswell and Erskine, as we have seen, could not agree with him concerning the comparative merits of the rival novelists; and it will presently be shown that during the 'Seventies and the 'Eighties, the Doctor failed, in his campaign against the author of *Tom Jones*, to convert several of the most distinguished members of his own literary coterie.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that, notwithstanding his wholesale disparagement of Fielding, Johnson had a good

²³ *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu*, London, 1817, II, 322.

²⁴ *The Works of Mrs. Chapone*, London, 1807, I, 175.

²⁵ Grant, Mrs. Anne, *Letters from the Mountains*, second ed., London, 1807, II, 46.

word for *Amelia*. One evening in April, 1776, while supping at the Crown and Anchor Tavern with Reynolds and others, "He told us," writes Boswell, that "he read Fielding's *AMELIA* through without stopping."²⁶ To this statement should be added the celebrated *dictum* about *Amelia's* nose. When Mrs. Thrale praised *Clarissa* to him as a perfect character, he replied: "On the contrary you may observe there is always something which she prefers to truth. Fielding's *Amelia* was the most pleasing heroine of all the romances (he said); but that vile broken nose never cured, ruined the sale of perhaps the only book, which being printed off betimes one morning, a new edition was called for before night."²⁷ That great Johnson scholar, G. B. Hill, who found it "strange that while Johnson . . . condemned Fielding, he should 'with an ardent and liberal earnestness' have revised Smollett's epitaph,"²⁸ finally decided, in view of the well-known *dicta* pronounced in the Burney Circle, that the Doctor "did not think so lowly of Fielding's powers" after all. This seems to be the most reasonable view of the matter, as will shortly appear. Instead of going on with Johnson, however, we should say a word concerning Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, which came out in 1778. It is interesting to observe what she thought of the great novelists who preceded her.

Of Fanny Burney's attitude as a girl toward Fielding and Richardson respectively, the editor of the *Early Diary* writes, "Through Fielding's novels she did but 'pick her way,' but she reminds Susan of their early love of Richardson's novels."²⁹ "Richardson's novels," says Austin Dobson, "had been the pas-

²⁶ Hill's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Oxford, 1887, III, 43.

²⁷ Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, London, 1786, pp. 221-222.

²⁸ Hill's *Boswell*, Oxford, 1887, II, 174 *note*. The quotation is from Boswell's *Hebrides*, October 28, 1773.

²⁹ *The Early Diary of Frances Burney*, edited by Annie Raine Ellis, London, 1889, I, lxxvii; also Mrs. Ellis's edition of *Cecilia*, London (Bohn), 1906, p. v: "And we know that she only picked her way among pages of Fielding."

sion of her . . . girlhood, and her first book, *Evelina*, is written in letters.”⁸⁰ Though she used the epistolary form, however, the young authoress adopted the manner not of the psychologist but of the satirist; doubtless she had Fielding in mind on more than one occasion. At any rate, Dr. Johnson’s disparagement of that author did not prevent her from doing a rather daring thing: in short, she classed the creator of “*Rasselas*” himself as a fiction-writer with Fielding and the rest. It is evident that in 1778 prose narrative as a *genre* was looked down upon; in an apologetic note Miss Burney asks pardon for ranking “the authors of *Rasselas* and *Eloïse* as Novelists.” Nevertheless she gallantly defends her profession and thus alludes to those who have gone before her: “However I may feel myself enlightened by the knowledge of Johnson, charmed with the eloquence of Rousseau, softened by the pathetic powers of Richardson, and exhilarated by the wit of Fielding and humour of Smollet; I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked”; she then tells of the new country of manners which she intends to explore. How popular the book was; what praise the charming young author received; how she worked off her exuberant spirits by dancing around the mulberry tree in “Daddy” Crisp’s garden—all these things are a matter of literary history. Naturally enough, *Evelina* (as well as *Cecilia*, which followed in 1782) was compared to the works of those famous predecessors whom she named in her preface. In *Cecilia*, for example, the *Monthly* reviewer discovered “much of the dignity and pathos of Richardson; and much of the acuteness and ingenuity of Fielding.”⁸¹ Successful as both novels (particularly *Evelina*) were, however, there was practically no question in the minds of anyone—except perhaps Dr. Johnson—about the superiority of Fielding; what *he* said of his “little Burney,” and what success his anti-Fielding propaganda met with in the Burney Circle it is now time to consider.

⁸⁰ Dobson’s *Samuel Richardson*, London, 1902, p. 199.

⁸¹ *The Monthly Review*, LXVII, 453 (December, 1782).

Here is the full text of the "real sentiments" of Fanny's father in 1778 concerning *Evelina*: "Why—upon my soul I think it the best novel I know, excepting Fielding's—and in some respects it is better than his. . . . I wish I may die if I do not believe it to be the best novel in the language Fielding's excepted—for Smollett's are so d——d gross that they are not fit reading for women with all their wit"—an observation which Fanny transcribes in her diary of June 18.³² Whatever Dr. Burney was pleased to write some years afterwards in a note to an edition of Boswell's *Life*, it is evident from this passage that in 1778 Fielding stood first in his regard. That he held Richardson in less esteem—notwithstanding the exertions of his friend Dr. Johnson—may be gathered from an explosion on the part of Miss Seward, who is scandalized by his "idea so opposite to Johnson's, that Richardson can be equalled by even the most accomplished novelist of this or any future period."³³

As a great admirer of both the author of *Clarissa* and the author of *Evelina* once pointed out, it is not on record that Johnson—whatever he might say of Fielding—ever exalted his "little Burney" above the great Richardson; but the following passages—in praise of *Evelina*—sound very different from the celebrated assertions that the author of *Tom Jones* was a "blockhead," a "barren rascal":

"'Oh, Mr. Smith, Mr. Smith is the man!' cried he [Johnson], laughing violently. 'Harry Fielding never drew so good a character!'" "I almost poked myself under the table," writes the delightful Fanny, "Never did I feel so delicious a confusion since I was born!" (August 23, 1778).³⁴

A few days later, Johnson said, "It's very true . . . Richardson would have been really afraid of her . . . Harry Fielding, too, would have been afraid of her; there is nothing

³² *The Early Diary of Frances Burney*, II, 231; and *Diary & Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, with notes by Dobson, London and New York, 1904, I, 33.

³³ *Letters of Anna Seward*, Edinburgh, 1811, IV, 311.

³⁴ Dobson's edition of the *Diary*, London, 1904, I, 72.

so delicately finished in all Harry Fielding's works, as in *Evelina*! . . . Oh, you little character-monger, you!"³⁵

And again there is the passage in which Dr. Johnson told Mr. Lort that "there were things and characters" in *Evelina* "more than worthy of Fielding."

"'Oh ho!' cried Mr. Lort, 'what, is it better than Fielding?'"

"'Harry Fielding,' answered Dr. Johnson, 'knew nothing but the shell of life.'"

"'So you ma'am,' added the flattering Mrs. Thrale, 'have found the kernel.'" Whereupon Fanny Burney exclaims, "Are they all mad? or do they want to make me so?"³⁶

There is also this passage: "'Dr. Johnson, ma'am,' added my kind puffer [Mrs. Thrale], 'says Fielding never wrote so well—never wrote equal to this book; he says it is a better picture of life and manners than is to be found anywhere in Fielding.'"

"'Indeed?' cried Mrs. Montagu surprised."³⁷ On another occasion, when Miss Burney sat "next to Mrs. Horneck," the latter said, "I have seen nothing like this [*Evelina*] since Fielding."³⁸

Obviously Mr. Lort and Mrs. Montagu were much "surprised" that the Doctor should rate *Evelina* above the novels of the celebrated Fielding. Back in 1760, Mrs. Montagu (though she preferred Richardson) had spoken well of the author of *Tom Jones* in Lyttelton's *Dialogues*; and in the meantime the fame of that novelist had gone on increasing. But how about the plays? Why had they not been equally successful? Accordingly, in the Doctor's presence she made the following innocent observation:

"'Fielding, who was so admirable in novel-writing, never succeeded when he wrote for the stage.'"

"'Very well said,' cried Dr. Johnson; 'that was an answer

³⁵ Dobson's edition of the *Diary*, I, 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 122.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 173, 174.

which showed she considered her subject.'"³⁹ For once, at least, the Great Cham—caught entirely off his guard—had admitted that Fielding's novels were admirable.

By "Daddy" Crisp as well as by Dr. Johnson, Mrs. Montagu's remark was received with approval. In a letter of December 8, 1778, he declares that Mrs. Montagu "very justly and judiciously enforces" her "observation" by "the instance she gives of Fielding, who, though so eminent in characters and descriptions, did by no means succeed in comedy."⁴⁰ Of the yet unpublished *Cecilia*, he wrote (April 5, 1782) that "nothing like it had appeared since Fielding and Smollett."⁴¹ Crisp, we may believe, had been as little influenced by Johnson's partizanship as had Dr. Burney himself.⁴²

It is hardly necessary to observe that, in reminding Fanny Burney that *even Fielding* had failed on the stage, Mrs. Montagu admitted the greatness of the novelist. And so, absent-mindedly, did Dr. Johnson himself when he applauded her observation, though his attention was presumably centered on Fielding's failure. The exclamation of surprise on the part of Mrs. Montagu and of Mr. Lort, the eagerness of Mrs. Piozzi to spread the news of the Doctor's comparisons, the unfeigned delight of Fanny Burney herself, as well as the more moderate judgment of "Daddy" Crisp and of Fanny Burney's father all go to show that these members of the Burney Circle voluntarily or involuntarily admitted Fielding's high repute in the year 1778, in spite of the abuse which their idol, Dr. Johnson, chose to inflict upon him. As for Johnson himself, his manifest desire to have his charming Fanny outshine *even Fielding* is a tacit admission of that writer's worth which sounds very different from the "blockhead"—"barren-rascal" talk. To rank Fanny Burney above a "blockhead" would be no compliment. Finally, in spite of his inveterate disparagement of that "bar-

³⁹ Dobson's edition of the *Diary*, I, 126.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 151-152.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, 80.

⁴² According to Fanny Burney, the only novel in her father's library was *Amelia*.—Preface to *The Wanderer*, London, 1814.

ren-rascal," Johnson wrote Boswell (February 11, 1784) in the last year of his life, when he was considering the relief to be obtained from a milder climate: "Fielding was sent to Lisbon, where, indeed, he died; but he was, I believe, past hope when he went."⁴³

A humorous sequel to the story of Johnson *vs.* Fielding comes from an unexpected quarter—in short, from the elegant gentleman at Strawberry Hill. The account of Horace Walpole, left unfinished in a previous chapter, may be thus completed.

Walpole's abuse of Fielding, both at home and abroad, as we have remarked, began early and continued late; in the 'Seventies and the 'Eighties he had still been busy. Here is the passage at arms between him and Mme. du Deffand. On July 14, 1773, she writes: "Je viens de relire *Tom Jones*, dont le commencement et la fin m'ont charmée. Je n'aime que les romans qui peignent les caractères, bons et mauvais. C'est là où l'on trouve de vraies leçons de morale; et si on peut tirer quelque fruit de la lecture, c'est de ces livres-là; . . . vos auteurs sont excellents dans ce genre."⁴⁴ This was too much for Walpole, who replied: "Je n'accorde pas, comme vous, le même mérite à nos romans. *Tom Jones* me fit un plaisir bien mince; il y a du burlesque, et ce que j'aime encore moins, les mœurs du vulgaire. Je conviens que c'est fort naturel, mais le naturel qui n'admet pas du goût me touche peu. Je trouve que c'est le goût qui assure tout, et qui fait le charme de tout ce qui regarde la société. . . . Nos romans sont grossiers. Dans *Gil Blas*, il s'agit très-souvent de valets . . . mais jamais, non, jamais ils ne dégoutent. Dans les romans de Fielding, il y a des curés de campagne qui sont de vrais cochons.—Je n'aime pas lire ce que je n'aimerais pas entendre."⁴⁵ But Mme. du Deffand was not so easily squelched. "Pourquoi les sentiments naturels ne seraient-ils pas vulgaires?" she retorted (August 8, 1773),

⁴³ Hill's *Boswell*, Oxford, 1887, IV, 200.

⁴⁴ *Lettres . . . à Horace Walpole*, Toynbee ed., Londres, 1912, II, 519.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 525 note.

"N'est-ce pas l'éducation qui les rend grands et relevés? Dans *Tom Jones*, Allworthy, Blifil, Square et surtout Mme. Miller, ne sont-ils pas d'une vérité infinie? Et Tom Jones, avec ses défauts et malgré toutes les fautes qu'ils lui font commettre, n'est-il pas estimable et aimable autant qu'on peut l'être? Enfin, quoi qu'il en soit, depuis vos romans, il m'est impossible d'en lire aucun des nôtres."⁴⁶ Realizing that he could not convert the lady, Walpole replied: "Nous ne sommes nullement d'accord sur nos romans; c'est le défaut du naturel qui me dégoût. . . . *Tom Jones* ne me fait pas la moindre impression."⁴⁷

A dozen years later he was still harping on the same string. In a note to John Pinkerton (1785), he writes: "Fielding had as much humour, perhaps, as Addison; but, having no idea of grace, is perpetually disgusting. His innkeepers and parsons are the grossest of their profession; and his gentlemen are awkward when they should be at their ease."⁴⁸ More evidence of the same sort comes from George Hardinge, who wrote, in his corrections to the *Literary Anecdotes* of John Nichols, "Mr. Walpole has often told me that he himself had no enjoyment of *Tom Jones*. 'It *might* be nature,' he said, 'it *might* be humour; but it was of a kind that could not interest *him*.' I pitied him, as I should pity a man who had not all his five senses."⁴⁹ Hardinge attributes this imperfect sympathy to the lack of an appreciation of humor, of which, in his opinion, neither Walpole nor Chesterfield, despite their "wit," had any "conception."

For nearly half a century the malicious Walpole had libeled Fielding and disparaged his works, when, in May, 1791 (only a few years before his death), he chanced to read in "the two new volumes" of Boswell that the poetry of his

⁴⁶ *Lettres . . . à Horace Walpole*, Toynbee ed., II, 525.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 525 note.

⁴⁸ *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, edited by Mrs. Toynbee, Oxford, 1915, XIII, 281.

⁴⁹ Hardinge, G., Corrections to *Literary Anecdotes* by Nichols, VIII, 525-526.

friend Gray was "dull, and that he was a *dull* man!" This was more than he could endure; he had long been angry with Johnson for that critic's efforts "to degrade my friend's superlative poetry." While inwardly raging, as he turned the pages of Boswell, he came across the "blockhead" passage; and then—forgetting for the moment his old animus against Fielding—he wrote to one of his friends as follows: "The same oracle dislikes Prior, Swift, and Fielding. If an elephant could write a book, perhaps one that had read a great deal would say that an Arabian horse is a very clumsy, ungraceful animal. Pass to a better chapter!"⁵⁰

Thus two of Fielding's most inveterate detractors for over a generation—the fribble and his "elephant"—came at last unwittingly to acknowledge, before they died, the literary standing of the man whom they had maligned. But they had done injuries that could not easily be righted; Walpole's scandalous story of the Fielding *ménage* and Johnson's charge that the novelist was "superficial" were destined to have a flourishing career in a century which was eager to listen.

II

Popular Voices

(1772-1784)

The increasing refinement of manners that by the time of *Evelina* (1778) was distinctly to be noticed in contemporary comment, militated of course against Fielding's novels, for no longer was the talk of a Squire Western admitted into the fiction of the day. Even Richardson was occasionally criticized on the score of improper scenes, though, in general, the creator of Grandison continued to hold his own as a moralist. This difference in attitude may be illustrated by Hannah More's change of feeling—prompted by Dr. Johnson—toward *Tom Jones*, which as a girl she frankly enjoyed. There

⁵⁰ *Letters of Horace Walpole*, Toynbee ed., XIV, 439.

is also a significant letter—to which we have previously alluded—by Fanny Burney herself. After reading *Pasquin* with her father, she wrote Mrs. Phillips, October 3, 1783: "I must own I too frequently meet with disgust in all Fielding's dramatic works, to laugh with a good heart even at his wit, excellent as it is; and I should never myself think it worth wading through so much dirt to get at. Where any of his best strokes are picked out for me, or separately quoted, I am always highly pleased, and can grin most cordially; but where I hear the bad with the good, it preponderates too heavily to suffer my mind to give the good fair play."⁵¹

In the 'Seventies the vogue of the "sublime instinct of sentiment," to use Mathias's phrase, was still undoubtedly very great. That popular novelist and man of all work, "Courtney Melmoth" (Samuel Jackson Pratt), whose "Joseph Andrews. A Farce," was performed at Drury Lane, April 20, 1778, gives an amusing and doubtless truthful picture of the sentimentalists of that day. In his *Pupil of Pleasure*, "a party of mighty pretty women" come "rustling" into a bookseller's shop and ask with "a lisping accent" for something sentimental, such, for example, as *The Mistakes of the Heart*. When *Joseph Andrews* is mentioned, one of the ladies exclaims, "Oh la! Ma'am . . . how can you possibly read such low stuff . . . the adventures of a footman, a kitchen-wench, and a strolling parson." *Tom Jones* is then suggested, whereupon "a pale languid lady" replies, "Aye, TOM JONES is tolerable enough . . . if he would but say more about the seraphic SOPHIA, and give us less nonsense about the old vulgar father, the fusty aunt, and those unentertaining horrid creatures, THWACKUM and SQUARE. He is shockingly tedious about those fellows. As to his Introductory Chapters . . . I always skip 'em." "Aye, Madam," agrees another, "and if he was a little plainer in telling us what we were really to expect, at the top of his chapters, it would be as well; in which case I really think it would be a goodish, prettyish, sort

⁵¹ Dobson's edition of her *Diary*, London, 1904, II, 226.

of a 'novel, to read once.' *Tom Jones*, it seems, was "now in reading by Lady Sallow's coachman."⁵²

"Courtney Melmoth" was one of Fielding's staunchest defenders. In *Liberal Opinions* (1776) he wrote: "It was the opinion of Horace, Rabelais, and Le Sage, of Cervantes, Swift, and Fielding" that "*laughing* satire was the likeliest to succeed";⁵³ and, retorting upon those who assailed the novelist as "low," he asked, "Who ever thought of charging Shakespeare with immorality, for having drawn an Iago?"⁵⁴ Though he acknowledged Richardson's high standing in the literary world, he drew attention to his lack of verisimilitude—a "fault" which is to be observed not only in *Grandison* but in *Clarissa*, while *Pamela* is "worse than either."⁵⁵ Fielding, he held to be "indisputably the most admirable" of "English Novel-writers" because he is "the most natural." "Whether humorous or serious, all his characters are taken from life; and so correct, that we instantly *feel* the resemblance . . . we are charmed by every stroke, because it is a faithful transcript from the volume of Human Nature." Smollett, who trod "pretty successfully" in Fielding's "steps," is, according to Pratt, inferior to his master; for "his wit is more studied, his laugh more laboured, and his sentiment less simple."⁵⁶

In low station or in high the devotees of "Sensibility" were, of course, lovers of Richardson and Sterne. But, despite the increasing refinement of manners just referred to, a counter-movement against senseless fastidiousness was now distinctly palpable; at least, the representation of scenes from ordinary life in both drama and novel was not so often stigmatized as "low." The introduction into a story of a Joseph Andrews or a Tony Lumpkin was less frequently regarded as proof of what Walpole called a deficiency in "taste": the "Branghtons"

⁵² *The Pupil of Pleasure*, by "Courtney Melmoth," second ed., London, 1777, pp. 28-30, 31.

⁵³ *Liberal Opinions*, London, Vol. III (1776), p. v.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, ix.

⁵⁵ Pratt's *Miscellanies*, London, 1785, III, 122.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 124, 125.

in Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, though repugnant to an ultra-sentimentalist like Miss Seward,⁵⁷ were a complete success. But this state of affairs had been long delayed. In the words of Mr. Dobson,⁵⁸ "Not until sentimental comedy lay dead or dying, was Colman able to write," as he did in the prologue to Miss Lee's *Chapter of Accidents* (1780):

When Fielding, Humour's fav'rite child, appear'd,
Low was the word—a word each author fear'd!
'Till chac'd at length, by Pleasantry's bright ray,
Nature and mirth resum'd their legal sway;
And Goldsmith's Genius bask'd in open day.⁵⁹

Defying those who, like Walpole and Mme. Riccoboni, complained of Fielding's *lowness*, Colman sent out more than one counterblast; always warm in his praise, he was never tired of alluding to him as "foremost of the Hum'rous train."⁶⁰ No doubt he was somewhat instrumental in bringing about a saner view of what was then called "taste." "Humour," he stoutly maintained (1775), "is not the growth of a frippery age," nor founded on "polished manners. It can only be cultivated by bold manly wits, such as Cervantes . . . Fielding," and others, who teach us "to despise a delicacy of manners that produces effeminacy."⁶¹ By the beginning of the eighth decade of the century, then, notwithstanding the fact that the grossness of language formerly allowed in print was now tabooed, "low" scenes—that is, scenes taken from the lower levels of society, were being released from the ban. Walpole had often declared that he did not care to read about people with whom he would not associate; but the Walpoles were growing fewer.

There can be no question regarding the popular interest in Fielding during this period (1772-1784). As Charles Dibdin, the dramatist and song-writer declared, somewhat later, re-

⁵⁷ *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, 341. To her mind, "low" and "insipid characters" were "too frequently obtruded."

⁵⁸ Dobson's *Samuel Richardson*, p. 119.

⁵⁹ Colman's *Prose on Several Occasions*, London, 1787, III, 227.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 240.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I, 172.

ferring to *Jonathan Wild*, which he had planned to transform into a sort of *Beggar's Opera*, "every body either has, or ought to have, FIELDING almost by heart."⁶² In his *Complete History of the Stage*, he asks, "Whoever copied CERVANTES so faithfully as FIELDING?"⁶³ and inserts the following enthusiastic passage: "FIELDING . . . has left behind him one species of reputation which no author ever so eminently possessed. His novels have hitherto been unequalled. *Tom Jones* is, perhaps, the finest assemblage of natural characters and happy incidents in any language. *Joseph Andrews* has a vein of the purest and most gratifying humour within the conception of human ingenuity; and were it not that it is professedly written as a satire on one author, and in imitation of another, it would be very nearly a complete work in its kind. *Amelia* manifests a most astonishing judgment of FIELDING'S knowledge of the world. There is scarcely a person or circumstance introduced in that novel but every body knows to be somebody or something already seen in real life. In short, though these novels may have—and indeed so has the sun, resplendent as it is—something to cavil at, yet the worst of them greatly excels the best of any other author, if nature, truth, interest, humour, and character are the requisites of such productions."⁶⁴

About this time the popular *Beauties of Fielding*—there were several editions within the year (1782)—took its place beside the *Beauties* of Johnson, Goldsmith, and Sterne in a series which, "principally intended" for the "youth of both sexes," had been, according to the publishers, "introduced into the most respectable Schools and Academies."⁶⁵ The *Beauties* was, of course, merely a collection of noteworthy passages from Fielding's works; out of school hours, however, the books themselves were very popular with the youth of that day. John Thelwall, we are told, had as a boy (*ca.* 1780) a

⁶² *The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin*, London, 1803, II, 62-63.

⁶³ *A Complete History of the Stage*, London, n.d., V, 43.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 38-39.

⁶⁵ *The Beauties of Fielding*, second ed., London, 1782, p. 204.

"sort of prejudiced contempt" for novels, "those of Fielding" being "almost the only ones" which he would read.⁶⁶ And, some years before this, William Beloe, the future Greek scholar, found, in his boyhood days, great delight in *Tom Jones*—an enthusiasm which he recalled with pleasure at three-score. "Shall I say," he asks, in his *Sexagenarian*, "which was the first book that most strongly excited my curiosity, and interested my sensibility? It was *Tom Jones*. My female Mentor tantalized me without mercy. She would let me have but one volume at a time; and not only would not afford me any clue to the concluding catastrophe, but rather put me upon a wrong scent. Sometimes too when my impatience of expectation was at the very highest point possible, the succeeding volume was mislaid, was lent, was not impossibly lost. However, after a long and most severe trial, after hating Blifil with no common hatred, forming a most friendly intimacy with Partridge, loving Sophia with rapturous extravagance, I complacently accompanied dear wicked Tom to the nuptial altar. I endeavoured of course to procure the other productions of this popular author, but I well remember that I did not peruse any of them, no not within a hundred degrees of the satisfaction, which the Foundling communciated."⁶⁷

That Fielding was widely read and generally popular can hardly be doubted by anyone who examines the books and pamphlets of the period. If Dr. Johnson had turned to an article in *The Edinburgh Evening Courant* on the feminine mania for reading, he would have been astonished to find that he himself was competing for popularity with the author whom he called a "blockhead." Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, complains the writer of the skit, have "nearly starved my youngest daughter at breast," while Fielding has received so much attention that he hints of starting "damages against Tom Jones."⁶⁸ This observation was written by Creech, the famous bookseller, who asserts elsewhere that Fielding is one of the

⁶⁶ *Poems*, Hereford, 1801, p. vii.

⁶⁷ Beloe, W., *The Sexagenarian*, London, 1817, Vol. I, ch. iii, p. 13.

⁶⁸ *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces*, Edinburgh and London, 1815, p. 342.

"best writers on the subject of politeness";⁶⁹ and, in still another place, that "there is more real wit and just satire in a very few pages" of "Swift or Fielding than in the whole book" of *Tristram Shandy*.⁷⁰

And the bookseller was right; Fielding's popularity is evident on every hand and in many different ways. Lord Chancellor Thurlow exclaimed, with an oath, that the poet Crabbe was "as like Parson Adams as twelve to the dozen";⁷¹ and the witty George Selwyn, who turned to books in his old age, announced that during the winter he might "admit" to his fire-side circle "that very popular man, Mr Thomas Jones."⁷² Gift copies of the novels went to and fro. George Cumberland, cousin of the dramatist, writes to his brother that a gentleman of his acquaintance "has made me a present of T. Jones, Joseph Andrews, &c., . . . and has discovered a Mahogany Cheese Tray for you."⁷³ And young men were still to be found who were as enraptured with the heroine of Fielding's masterpiece as their predecessors had been in the days of Lady Bradshaigh. A case in point is that of a certain Archibald Fletcher, who confessed that until his infatuation for his Eliza Dawson (whom in his letters he addressed as "Sophia" and whom he subsequently married), the celebrated Miss Western remained with him an unapproachable ideal.⁷⁴

For many purposes the writers of the period turned to their "facetious master." There was, as usual, the brief allusion, such, for example, as a reference in *The Excursion*, by Mrs. Frances Brooke, who in order to describe one of her female characters borrows "the admirable definition of Fielding" and

⁶⁹ *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces*, p. 150. From *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, August 30, 1783.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁷¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, eleventh ed., VII, 358 ("Crabbe").

⁷² Kerr, S. P., *George Selwyn*, London, n.d. [1909], p. 312.

⁷³ *The Cumberland Letters*, London, 1912, p. 117. "Probably belongs to this season [1777]," according to the editor.

⁷⁴ *Side-Lights on the Georgian Period*, by "George Paston," London, 1902, pp. 260-262. Fletcher met his Eliza in 1787; he had read *Tom Jones* some ten years earlier. See Mrs. Fletcher's *Autobiography*, Boston, 1876.

says that "everybody knew her" to be "what nobody chose to call her."⁷⁵ There was, too, the extended passage. William Jackson, the eminent musician and landscape painter, lamenting in his *Thirty Letters* (1782) the neglect of genius, discourses as follows: "Poor, unhappy, half-starved . . . Fielding! Does it not grieve you to be told that the author of Tom Jones lies in the factory's burying-ground at Lisbon, undistinguished, unregarded—not a stone to mark the place!"⁷⁶ In *Love and Madness* (1780) by Sir Herbert Croft (who contributed the life of Young to Johnson's *Poets*) a reference to Fielding is introduced into the Hackman-Ray correspondence.⁷⁷ And in the *Essays, Letters, and Poems* of Edmund Rack there are frequent allusions. "Being last night employed in reading the facetious works of the late inimitable Fielding," Rack falls into a "profound meditation" and produces some elephantine nonsense entitled the "Dissection of an Author's Head."⁷⁸ Though like many of his betters Rack thought novelists were not to be taken very seriously, and though he said that the "productions of Fielding, and the rest of our best novel writers, if they have not injured the cause of virtue, have never contributed to its support or advancement,"⁷⁹ he listed Fielding with those authors whose works "afford an agreeable employment, in the hours of relaxation from higher studies."⁸⁰

Another hack writer who was never tired of referring to Fielding was the indefatigable William Combe, whose *Dr. Syntax* is of the Quixotic breed of Parson Adams. In his *Original Love-Letters* (1784), he tells us, thinking perhaps of

⁷⁵ *The Excursion*, London, 1777, I, 62.

⁷⁶ *Thirty Letters on Various Subjects*, London, 1783, I, 79 (letter XXVI). Ten years before, Wraxall had found Fielding's grave "nearly concealed by weeds and nettles."—*Historical Memoirs*, London, 1836, I, 54.

⁷⁷ *Love and Madness . . . In a Series of Letters*, London, 1780, p. 30 (letter XIV).

⁷⁸ Rack, Edmund, *Essays, Letters, and Poems*, Bath, 1781, p. 391.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Gray, that "to build airy castles of fancied paradisaic happiness, is . . . to prefer . . . a Tale of the Genii to the History of *Tom Jones*, or an Indian fire-screen to a picture of *Raphael's*."⁸¹ Whether or not the very popular *Letters* (1780) of the "wicked Lord Lyttelton," the son of Fielding's patron, were fabricated by Combe⁸² or were really authentic is immaterial; whoever wrote them counted on an audience that knew and enjoyed Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*. In Letter the Forty-Third, we are given a lengthy description of a clergyman of "blunt simplicity and unpolished benevolence" who "has no other name" than Parson Adams, and who is made to furnish amusement for many pages. We see him emptying his pockets for the lost sermon, breaking "the cordage of the bell, in the violence of ringing it," and gorging himself on "the best part of a fowl, with a proportionable quantity of ham," which he "seized on" "without grace or apology."⁸³

Thus the fame of Fielding was made use of by writers of this period. Even the sentimental Hayley had a pleasant word for his novels, though—naturally enough—his enthusiasm was kept for the author of *Clarissa*. In order that he (Hayley) may "rank" as "Virtue's friend," he seeks the guidance of those two "immortal minds, of philanthropic mold," Samuel Richardson and Edward Young, whose "effluence bright of highest genius"⁸⁴ will set his feet aright. But for all that he can thus refer to Fielding—in his verses on Hogarth:

While Truth of Character, exactly hit,
And drest in all the dyes of comic wit;
While these, in FIELDING'S page, delight supply,
So long thy Pencil with his Pen shall vie.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Original Love-Letters*, London, 1784, II, 56, 57.

⁸² Thomas Frost (*The Life of . . . Lord Lyttelton*, London, 1876, pp. x, xi, xix) thinks they are Lyttelton's; but see *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, eleventh ed., VI, 751.

⁸³ *Letters of the late Lord Lyttelton*, eighth ed., London, 1793, II, 98 ff. In the *History of Johnny Quae Genus* (new ed., New York, 1903, preface dated May 1, 1821), Combe was still alluding to Fielding.

⁸⁴ *Poems and Plays*, by William Hayley, London, 1785, VI, 4, 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 39.

In the winter of 1778, discussion of Fielding's works was stimulated by the production of the long-lost play, *The Fathers: or, the Good-Natur'd Man*, which Garrick furnished with a prologue and an epilogue and which was first performed November 30 at Drury Lane. "I have finish'd my prol: & Epil: for Fielding's play," wrote Garrick enthusiastically to Hannah More, "and have been very lucky—I have in y^e first introduced the Characters in *Tom Jones* & *Joseph Andrews* pleading at y^e Bar of y^e Publick for y^e Play—it is really tolerably done . . . say nothing about it."⁸⁶ In the light of various anecdotes which reflect the famous actor's love for Fielding, the prologue and epilogue to *The Fathers* possess more than ordinary interest; the prologue, which is one of the best Garrick ever wrote, shows an excellent appreciation of the characters of *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*—*Amelia*, significantly enough, is not even mentioned:

But who the author? need I name the wit,
Whom Nature prompted as his genius writ?
Truth smil'd on Fancy for each well-wrought story,
Where characters, live, act, and stand before ye: . . .
First pleads TOM JONES—grateful his heart and warm;
Brave, gen'rous Britons—shield this play from harm:
My best friend wrote it, should it not succeed,
Though with my SOPHY blest—my heart will bleed.—
Then from his face he wipes the manly tear;
Courage, my master; PARTRIDGE cries, don't fear:
Should Envy's serpents hiss, or malice frown,
Though I'm a coward, zounds! I'll knock 'em down.
Next, sweet SOPHIA comes—she cannot speak—
Her wishes for the play o'erspread her cheek;
In ev'ry look her sentiments you read:
And more than eloquence her blushes plead.
Now BLIFIL bows—with smiles his false heart gilding:
He was my foe—I beg you'll damn this FIELDING.

⁸⁶ Baker's *Some Unpublished Correspondence* of Garrick, Boston, 1907, p. 105 (letter dated November 23, 1778). Garrick sent copies to Lady Spencer, who gave him *her* opinion.—*The Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, London, 1832, II, 318.

Right, THWAKUM roars—no mercy, Sirs, I pray—
 Scourage the dead Author, thro' his orphan play.
 What words! (cries PARSON ADAMS), fie, fie, disown 'em;
 Good Lord!—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*;
 If such are Christian teachers, who'll revere 'em?—
 And thus they preach, the devil alone should hear 'em.
 Now SLIPSLOP enters—tho' this *scriv'ning vagrant*,
 'Salted my virtue, which was ever *flagrant*,
 Yet, like black 'THELLO, I'd bear scorns and whips,
 Slip into poverty to the very hips,
 T' *exult* this play—may it *decrease* in favour;
 And be its fame *immoraliz'd* for ever!
 'SQUIRE WESTERN, reeling, with *October* mellow,
 Tall, yo!—Boys!—Yoax—Criticks! hunt the fellow!
 Damn 'en, these wits are varmint not worth breeding.
 What good e'er came of writing and of reading?
 Next comes, brim-full of spite and politicks;
 His Sister WESTERN—and thus deeply speaks:
 Wits are arm'd pow'rs—like France attack the foe;
 Negotiate 'till they sleep—then strike the blow!
 ALLWORTHY last pleads to your noblest passions—
 Ye gen'rous leaders of the taste and fashions;
 Departed genius left his orphan play,
 To your kind care—what the dead wills obey:
 O then respect the FATHER's fond bequest,
 And make his widow smile, his spirit rest.⁸⁷

In *The St. James's Chronicle* appeared the following news from Drury Lane: "Last Night a Comedy called *The Fathers*, or *The Good-natured Man*, was performed for the first Time at this Theatre. It was written by the late *Henry Fielding*, one of the first Geniuses that ever adorned this Island."⁸⁸ The comedy had started out under good auspices; for Sheridan, then the manager of Drury Lane, withdrew his own very popular *School for Scandal* for several nights to give it room, and Garrick, who had identified the play in the first

⁸⁷ Fielding's *Works*, new ed., London, 1783, IV, 371-372.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Cross's *Fielding*, III, 107.

place and had acted as its foster father, occupied his box with "the 'heavenly Lady Spencer' and her friends."⁸⁹ His prologue, according to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, "was delivered by Mr. King" with "great humour, and received with universal applause."⁹⁰ Not until the night after the performance did outsiders find out—so closely had the secret been guarded—that the prologue (and epilogue) had been written by Garrick. One can therefore imagine the interest which was created when this bit of news ran the rounds of the periodicals. Thus, in the winter of 1778, all literary London was talking of Garrick and the comedy and of that "son of fame"—to use the words of the prologue—

Whom Nature prompted as his genius writ.

In his dedication of *The Fathers* to the Duke of Northumberland, Sir John Fielding, who, by the way, seems always (except possibly in the matter of Murphy's "Essay") to have acted admirably in all affairs connected with his brother, improved the opportunity to insert the following tribute: "The author of this play was an upright, useful, and distinguished magistrate for the county of Middlesex; and by his publications laid the foundation of many wholesome laws for the support of good order and subordination in this metropolis, the effects of which have been, and now are, forcibly felt by the public. His social qualities made his company highly entertaining. His genius, so universally admired, has afforded delight and instruction to thousands. The memory of such a man calls for respect; and to have that respect shown him by the great and praise-worthy, must do him the highest honour."⁹¹

Sir John's statement that his brother's genius was "universally admired" was much nearer the truth in 1778 than at any

⁸⁹ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 104, 105.

⁹⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XLVIII, 587 (December, 1778). See also *The London Magazine*, XLVII, 561 (December, 1778).

⁹¹ Included with the play in the "new edition" of Murphy in 1783, IV, 369.

previous time; as has been shown, indications of popular favor were increasing in number and variety. Within two years after the appearance of *The Fathers*, Kane O'Hara's burletta of *Tom Thumb*⁹² (the form in which Scott and Byron and others of still later date knew and enjoyed the play) brought not only the adapter but the original author before public notice. Two years later still, at Paris, Desforges's "TOM JONES A LONDRES," a verse comedy in five acts, was played "*pour la première fois, par les Comédiens Italiens . . . le Mardi 22 Octobre 1782.*"⁹³ And in 1787 Desforges presented at Paris another five-act comedy (first performed by the "Comédiens Italiens" April 17) entitled "TOM JONES ET FELLAMAR, SUITE DE TOM JONES A LONDRES."⁹⁴ Meanwhile, to judge from the numerous editions (an account of which will be given in the next chapter), Fielding's novels had more readers on both sides of the water than ever before; a "new" London edition (which includes *The Fathers*) of the *Works* appeared in 1783 (there was also a London edition of the *Works* in 1780 and another in 1784); and, three years before, in the first volume (1780) of Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine*, the popular Stothard had begun, with *Joseph Andrews*,⁹⁴ that series of illustrations for the works of Fielding (and other fiction-writers) which so much delighted the readers of the century-end. Manifestations of popular interest in the novels of Fielding are thus to be found on every hand—to the playwright and to the playgoer; to the patron of the circulating library and to the buyer of books; to the publisher, the illustrator, and the literary hack, the celebrated narratives were a source of either pleasure or profit.

⁹² Performed October 3, 1780. See Oulton, *History of the Theatres*, London, 1796, I, 98.

⁹³ From the title-page of the printed copy.

⁹⁴ For the "history" of the picture which was designed by Dodd and amended by Stothard, see A. C. Coxhead's *Thomas Stothard*, London, 1906, p. 61.

III

The Praise of Scholars

(1772-1784)

While Dr. Johnson was still fulminating against Fielding as a "barren rascal" and exalting Richardson as one who had taught the passions to move at the command of virtue, scholarly men within "The Club" and without were beginning to allow favorable mention and actual praise of the novelist to appear in their serious productions. Even in the early 'Seventies fiction as a *genre* had not yet won a distinguished place in literature; but, as we have observed, the works of Richardson had enjoyed, almost from the time of their initial appearance, the attention and approbation of many of the most influential literary men of England and of continental Europe. With the novels of Fielding the case was very different; scholarly recognition, in spite of their popularity with the reading public, had been a thing of slow growth. But at the opening of the seventh decade a change in Fielding's favor is clearly to be perceived.

Especially recalcitrant had been the writers on rhetoric and aesthetics; it is a peculiar experience to look through treatise after treatise on laughter or ridicule (and due to Shaftesbury's famous *dictum* to the effect that ridicule is the test of truth, there were many of these) and discover that the works of the greatest humorist of that century are entirely ignored. In 1770, it is true, James Beattie had made mention of Fielding in his maiden effort, the celebrated *Essay on Truth*; but the main body of his criticism comes a few years later. One of the pioneers among the rhetorician critics in recognizing Fielding was Beattie's friend, Dr. John Ogilvie, the noted divine and controversialist. In *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Various Species of Composition* (1774), praise is allowed the character of Parson Adams, which is "marked with *little strokes* which render it *truly comic*," which is rarely carried

"beyond nature," and which is "most judiciously contrasted"⁹⁵ with the other characters. Ogilvie, however, from the time of his early correspondence with Beattie to the time of the appearance of his *Observations* was a devotee of Richardson, who, in his opinion, had the "power" of "dissolving the mind in that sublime melancholy which exalted genius can alone either feel or communicate."

At last, then, Fielding had gained a slight foothold in a formal treatise on rhetoric; but the writer of that book was too much a Richardsonian to be regarded as his great admirer. It was Ogilvie's friend Beattie—who, many years before, in a letter on *Clarissa*, had been bold enough, despite great commendation, to suggest that its author *did have faults*⁹⁶ and who still held the same opinion—that was the real *avant-coureur*. To James Beattie, author of *The Minstrel*, popular essayist, and professor of moral philosophy at Marischal College, Aberdeen, belongs the honor of being the first writer of influence to speak frequently and heartily of Fielding from the scholar's seat. Whatever may be thought of them now, his *Essays* (1776) and his *Dissertations* (1783) were among the most popular books of their kind during the generation following their appearance. To Beattie, Dr. Johnson's opposition to Fielding seemed nothing short of a vagary; in order to give an example of what he terms the Doctor's most "violent prejudices" he exclaims (in a private letter), "He [Johnson] preferred Smollet to Fielding[!]."⁹⁷ At certain times and in some particulars Beattie found fault with the novelist; nor did he regard the subject of prose fiction as one which deserved very serious study—no one did then—but a collection from his works of the passages relating to Fielding is extensive enough to remind us of similar aggregates which may be gathered later from the works of Hazlitt or of Leigh Hunt.

⁹⁵ Ogilvie, John, *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Nature, Characters, and Various Species of Composition*, London, 1774, I, 343, 345.

⁹⁶ Forbes, William, *Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*, New York, 1807, pp. 27-32.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 398 (letter dated November 26, 1785).

"Of the comick epopee," wrote Beattie, in his "Essay on Poetry and Musick," "we have two exquisite models in English, I mean the *Amelia* and *Tom Jones* of Fielding."⁹⁸ He saw the value of the initial dissertations. "A certain French author [La Place]," he says, "to render his translation of *Tom Jones* more acceptable to his countrymen, and to clear it of what he foolishly calls English phlegm, has greatly abridged that incomparable performance, and, in my opinion, expunged some of the finest passages; those conversation pieces, I mean, which tend more immediately to the elucidation of the characters, than to the progress of the story."⁹⁹ He paid a tribute to Fielding's attainments as a scholar, "many parts" of whose works "discover at once a brilliant wit and copious erudition."¹⁰⁰ And of Fielding's indebtedness to Cervantes he declared: "I believe there are few criticks in Great Britain, who do not think in their hearts, that Fielding has outdone his master."¹⁰¹ If Beattie's contemporaries really felt "in their hearts" toward Fielding as Beattie says they did, most of them made sure that their hearts did not get into printer's ink.

For Fielding's structural art, Beattie has always the highest praise. He asserts (as did Murphy) that both *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* "would bear to be examined by Aristotle himself," and "if compared with those of Homer, would not greatly suffer in the comparison"—statements which he justifies as follows: "This author, to an amazing variety of probable occurrences, and of characters well drawn, well supported, and finely contrasted, has given the most perfect unity, by making them all coöperate to one and the same final purpose. It yields a very pleasing surprise to observe, in the unravelling of his plots, particularly that of *Tom Jones*, how many incidents, to

⁹⁸ Beattie, James, *Works*, Philadelphia, 1809, V, 275 note.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, 271. The "Essay on Laughter" was written "in the year 1764."—VI, 125.

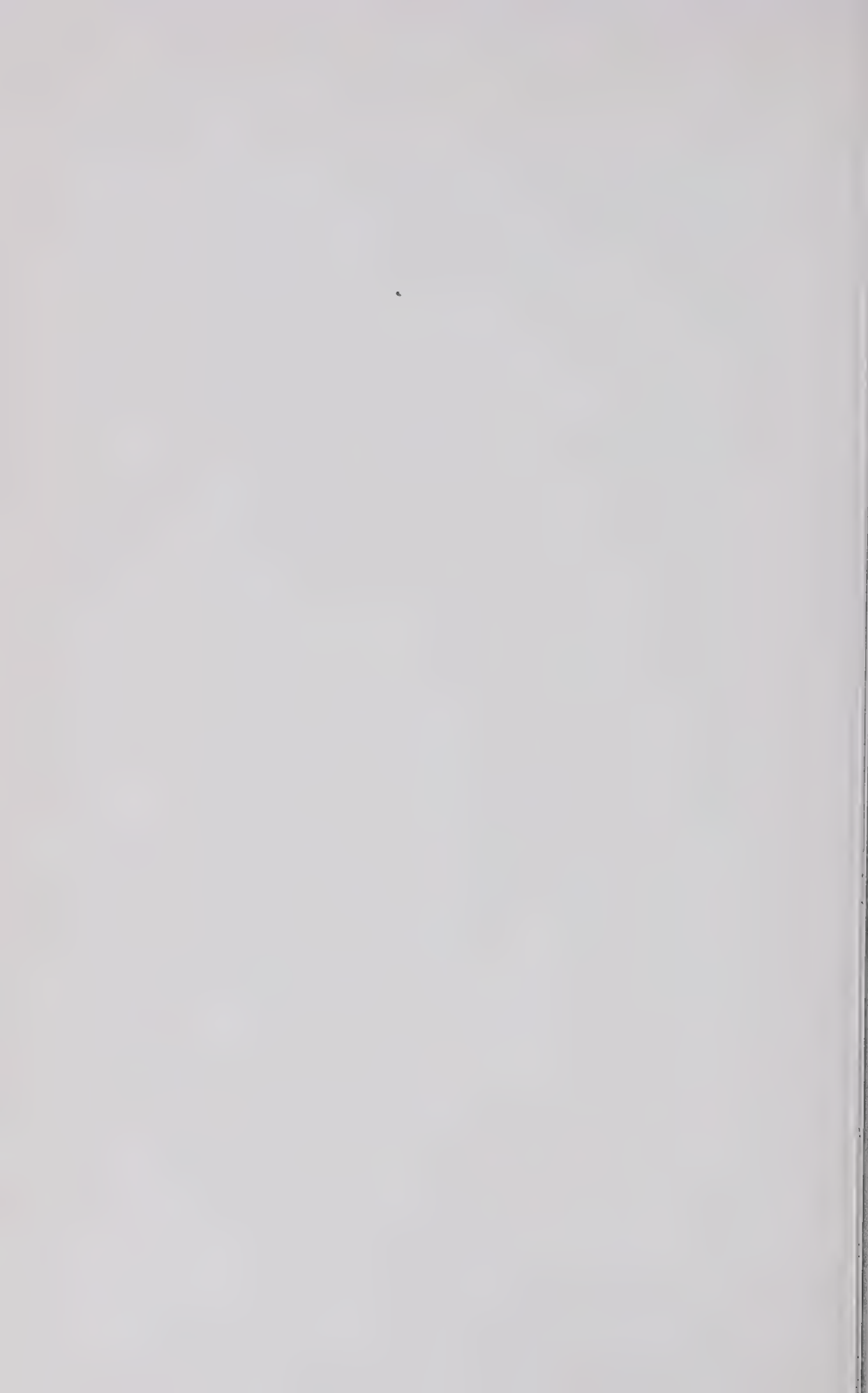
¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, VI, 356. "On the Utility of Classical Learning." Written in 1769.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 358.



THE DOOR FLEW OPEN AND IN CAME
SQUIRE WESTERN

(Tom Jones, Book XV, Chapter V)



which, because of their apparent minuteness, we had scarce attended as they occurred in the narrative, are found to have been essential to the plot. And what heightens our idea of the poet's art is, that all this is effected by natural means, and human abilities, without any machinery." Even Cervantes, Fielding's "great master," declares Beattie, was "obliged to work a miracle for the cure of Don Quixote."¹⁰²

The various essays in which these passages occur were published together in 1776;¹⁰³ some of them, however, had been written in the 'Sixties,—the essay on "Laughter," for example, dating from 1764, two years after the *Life* by Murphy, with whose criticisms Beattie shows himself familiar. Even as early as 1770, in the "Essay on Truth," Beattie had not hesitated to refer to the novelist as an authority on the subject of human nature. "Great vicissitudes of fortune," he wrote, "gave Fielding an opportunity of associating with all classes of men, except perhaps the highest, whom he rarely attempts to describe." Then, quoting the "compliment" Fielding paid Aristotle,—that no one ever understood human nature better,—he declares that this testimony from such a witness will "be allowed to have considerable weight."¹⁰⁴ As we examine the works of other philosophic writers—Reid, Gerard, Kames, Hume, and Burke—we are inclined to suspect that those grave persons must have gone out of their way to avoid Fielding; not only to quote but to quote with approbation from the works of that facetious gentleman required boldness.

In 1783 Beattie included in his *Dissertations*¹⁰⁵ an essay on fiction, which gave a more detailed account of Fielding's novels than had appeared in the *Essays*. It is obvious that fiction had not as yet come into its own; he tells Forbes (January 18, 1780), for example, that he will finish up his essay on romance-writing "not because it is important, but because it

¹⁰² *Works*, V, 275-276 note. "Essay on Poetry and Musick."

¹⁰³ *Essays*, Edinburgh, 1776.

¹⁰⁴ *Works*, V, 92-93, 95.

¹⁰⁵ *Dissertations Moral and Critical* . . . By James Beattie, London and Edinburgh, 1783.

is amusing, and will require no deep study."¹⁰⁶ Still, no one can doubt that Beattie wrote with interest the dissertation "On Fable and Romance," particularly that part of it which deals with Fielding. Smollett, to his mind, is the inferior artist, in that he seems not to have known "how to contrive a regular fable"; while as regards "morality," one "cannot compliment" at all an author so "inexcusably licentious." Beattie then proceeds as follows:

"This form of the comick romance [*i.e.*, the "Comick, and Poetically Arranged," which includes Fielding's three main novels] has been brought to perfection in England by Henry Fielding, who seems to have possessed more wit and humour, and more knowledge of mankind, than any other person of modern times, Shakespeare excepted; and whose great natural abilities were refined by a classical taste, which he had acquired by studying the best authors of antiquity: though it cannot be denied, that he appears on some occasions to have been rather too ostentatious, both of his learning, and of his wit.

"Some have said, that Joseph Andrews is the best performance of Fielding. But its chief merit is parson Adams; who is indeed a character of masterly invention, and, next to Don Quixote, the most ludicrous personage that ever appeared in romance. This work [however], though full of exquisite humour, is blamable in many respects. . . .

"*Tom Jones* and *Amelia* are Fielding's best performances; and the most perfect, perhaps, of their kind in the world. . . . Since the days of Homer, the world has not seen a more artful epick fable. The characters and adventures are wonderfully diversified: yet the circumstances are all so natural, and rise so easily from one another, and co-operate with so much regularity in bringing on, even while they seem to retard, the catastrophe, that the curiosity of the reader . . . grows more and more impatient as the story advances, till at last it becomes downright anxiety. And when we get to the end . . . we are amazed to find, that of so many incidents there should be so

¹⁰⁶ Forbes, *An Account of the Life . . . of James Beattie*, p. 323.

few superfluous; that in such variety of fiction there should be so great probability; and that so complex a tale should be perspicuously conducted, and with perfect unity of design. These remarks may be applied either to *Tom Jones* or to *Amelia*: but they are made with a view to the former chiefly; which might give scope to a great deal of criticism, if I were not in haste to conclude the subject. Since the time of Fielding . . . the comick romance . . . seems to have been declining apace from simplicity and nature, into improbability and affectation."¹⁰⁷

There is much in Beattie's works about Fielding; but enough has been given to show that his admiration was as great as it was intelligent. His private correspondence contains more than one allusion to the characters and incidents of the novels. In one of his letters, he speaks of a certain Major Mercer as possessing the "sensibility of Rousseau, and the generosity of Tom Jones";¹⁰⁸ and, in another (December 12, 1789), he says that "Fielding's imitation" of a scene from the De Coverley papers, "in that part of 'Tom Jones' where Partridge goes to see 'Hamlet,' is hardly inferior"¹⁰⁹ to its source. Moreover, he warmly recommended the reading of Fielding to his son during the boy's "last illness." The following lines by that youthful versifier are indicative of the novelist's popularity at this time:

The beau buys Fielding's works complete,
Each page with rapture cons,
Sophias finds in every street,
And is himself Tom Jones.¹¹⁰

Still the younger Beattie was not so enthusiastic as the elder. He "read Tom Jones," writes his father, "and, I think, Amelia," and "gave that author no little praise for his humour, for the very skilful management of his fable, the va-

¹⁰⁷ *Works*, III, 108-112.

¹⁰⁸ Forbes, *An Account of the Life . . . of James Beattie*, p. 297.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

¹¹⁰ *Works*, X, 251.

riety and contrast of his characters, and, with a few exceptions, for the beautiful simplicity of his style"; yet he felt that "there was more danger from the indelicacy of particular passages, than hope of its doing good by the satire, the moral sentiments, or the distributive justice dispensed in winding up the catastrophe."¹¹¹ In this criticism, however, there is probably as much of the doting parent as of the boy himself; at least, so we may judge from Beattie's own remarks on Fielding in one of his last works, *The Elements of Moral Science*, in which he made the following admission: "Of Fielding, as a novelist, I admire the humour, and his artful contexture of fable; in which last respect I think he has no equal among the moderns: but his morality and delicacy are not what I wish they had been; and his style, though in general excellent, especially in his latter works, is not always free from bombast, and sometimes betrays an unnecessary ostentation of learning."¹¹² In fact, Beattie had come to the conclusion that "romances" were "a very unprofitable study," "most of them being unskilfully written, and the greater part indecent and immoral." As exceptions, he lists *Robinson Crusoe*, the "novels of Richardson," and those of Mackenzie and Fanny Burney; and declares that he "might have found" others, if he "had not for many years, by want of time and of inclination, been restrained from this sort of reading."¹¹³ But this was the talk of a moral philosopher at the end of his career. The *dicta* which everyone knew were the passages in the *Essays* and the *Dissertations*. In his *Essays* he had asserted that by "versifying Tom Jones and the Merry Wives of Windsor, we should spoil the two finest comic poems, the one epick, the other dramatical, now in the world."¹¹⁴ In the *Dissertations* he had said of *Tom Jones* that

¹¹¹ *Works*, X, 163. The young man died in 1790, aged 22; and his father appended to an edition of *The Mimic*, 1797, an account of his life.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, IX, 190. *The Elements of Moral Science*, Vol. II, Edinburgh and London, is dated 1793. See ch. i of Part IV.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, IX, 189, 190.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 99.

the hero "might be vindicated in regard to all censurable conduct" had the writer "been less particular in describing it." Very firmly did he draw the line between the author of *Tom Jones* and the author of *Peregrine Pickle*; "Smollet's system of youthful profligacy, as exemplified in some of his liberties," was "altogether without excuse." "Crimes that bring dishonour, or that betray a hard heart, or an injurious disposition" should "never be fixed on a character" who is "recommended to our esteem."¹¹⁵

For a professor of moral philosophy in one of the established universities to defend in a scholarly treatise the morals of *Tom Jones*; and, in the face of the Richardsonians, assert that Fielding's knowledge of the world (rather than Richardson's) might be mentioned in the same breath with that of Shakespeare, was a bolder deed than we can easily realize to-day. Among the letters which Beattie received apropos of his rashness was a remonstrance from the celebrated Lord Hailes. "You don't censure the indelicacies of Fielding with sufficient severity," complains his lordship, "his indelicacies are generally the duller parts of his work. His knowledge of human nature was not from a sort of intuition or moral sensibility as Shakespeare's, but merely from acute observation; hence whenever he wanders into genteel company he loses himself."¹¹⁶ Thus the old charge of "lowness" as opposed to "genility," of "observation" rather than "imagination," was again preferred against the facetious Fielding.

Meanwhile the *Essays* and the *Dissertations* became so popular that in due time there appeared a *Beauties of Beattie*, and the author's reputation was still considerable in the days of "Christopher North." Look where we may, we find no one before Beattie of equal authority and popularity (whose observations were incorporated in works of a serious nature) that wrote so often of Fielding and so well. It is true that he was unfortunate in accenting the distinction (then generally

¹¹⁵ *Works*, III, 110-111.

¹¹⁶ Forbes, Margaret, *Beattie and his Friends*, Westminster, 1904, pp. 193-194.

accepted) between the *serious* romance of Richardson and the *comick* of Fielding. He was somewhat responsible, moreover, for the popular notion at the end of the century that Fielding was rather pedantic and bombastic. Finally, toward the close of his life, he was less firm in his stand about Fielding's "morality." These things, however, count little compared with the excellent remarks which are strewn throughout his other works. It is worth while to observe that Beattie was the earliest writer of standing to champion frequently in his serious publications the cause of the unfortunate *Amelia*, a novel which Murphy slighted and which Garrick (in his Prologue) entirely ignored. Highly as he esteemed the productions of Richardson, *Amelia* seems to have given him more pleasure than *Clarissa*.¹¹⁷ In his *Dissertations* he had gone so far as to include *Clarissa* in a list of "gloomy compositions . . . captivating to young people," to whom "misfortune and sorrow are novelities." Lovelace, he says, "with a little more skill" in the "use of the small sword," might have "triumphed over *Clarissa's* avenger" and "the censure of the world." And Grandison himself, inferior to Fielding's Allworthy because less "human," is "so distant" and "so formal" as to forbid "all cordial attachment." Before Beattie's time, it had been almost a convention among critics (witness his friend Mrs. Montagu) to subordinate Fielding to Richardson. Sentimentalist as he was, the author of *The Minstrel* reversed the order; eventually, as will be seen, he had many followers. In brief, no one before Beattie of similar standing who had the ear of the public had spoken (and spoken appositely) of Fielding in the same breath with Shakespeare, had found him comparable in certain respects with Homer, and had pronounced him in certain other respects superior to Cervantes. With Beattie a new era for Fielding had begun. Moreover, during the generation which preceeded the publication of *Waverley* (1814), the spell in which Richardson had held his readers ever since the beginning now showed signs of weakening. That predilection for formal

¹¹⁷ For Richardson, see *Works*, III, 102-106 ("On Fable and Romance"); also I, 298.

elegance which had militated against the author of *Tom Jones* was giving way—despite the vogue of the Gothic romance—to a better understanding of his artistic purpose.

Another writer of reputation, who was not afraid to lend a scholarly name to the cause of Fielding, was Beattie's sometime neighbor, Lord Monboddo, the learned Scotch judge, whose third volume of the *Origin and Progress of Language* appeared in the same year (1776) as did Beattie's *Essays*. Lord Monboddo was fearless enough to proclaim Fielding "one of the greatest poetical geniuses of his age." "Nor do I think," he continues, "that his work has hitherto met with the praise that it deserves."¹¹⁸ True, his lordship makes some strictures: he objects, for example, to *any* inclusion of the mock-heroic; the "squabble in a country churchyard" (*Tom Jones*, Book IV, ch. viii), though "an excellent parody of Homer's battles," is "not proper for such a work." In the first place, it is "too great a change of style," greater than in "any work of a legitimate kind, which I think Fielding's is, from the simple and familiar to the heroic or mock-heroic"; no "regular work" ought to have a "patch" of this sort, "shining" as it is. "*Secondly*, because it [the mock-heroic style] destroys the probability of the narrative, which ought to be carefully studied in all works, that, like Mr. Fielding's, are imitations of real life and manners, and which, accordingly, has been very much laboured by that author. . . . This, therefore, I cannot help thinking a blemish, in a work which has otherwise a great deal of merit, and which I should have thought perfect of the kind, if it had not been for this, and another fault that I find to it, namely, the author's appearing too much in it himself, who had nothing to do in it at all. By this . . . I mean his reflections with which he begins his books, and sometimes his chapters."¹¹⁹

Monboddo accepts Fielding's own classification of *Tom Jones* as a comic-epic: "There is lately sprung up, among us,"

¹¹⁸ *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, Edinburgh, 1776, III, 298 note.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 296-298.

he says, "a species of narrative poem, representing likewise the characters of common life. It has the same relation to comedy that the epic has to tragedy, and differs from the epic in the same respect that comedy differs from tragedy; that is, in the actions and characters, both which are much nobler in the epic than in it. It is therefore, I think, a legitimate kind of poem; and . . . the reason why I mention it is, that we have, in English, a *poem* of that kind, (for so I will call it) which has more of character in it than any work, ancient or modern, that I know. The work I mean is, the *History of Tom Jones*, by Henry Fielding, which, as it has more personages brought into the story than any thing of the poetic kind I have ever seen; so all those personages have characters peculiar to them, in so much, that there is not even an host or an hostess upon the road, hardly a servant, who is not distinguished in that way; in short, I never saw any thing that was so much animated, and, as I may say, *all alive* with characters and manners, as the history of *Tom Jones*."¹²⁰

In a footnote Monboddó allows very high praise to the plot of *Tom Jones*. "The fable of this piece is, I think, an extraordinary effort both of genius and art; for, though it be very complex taking in as great a variety of matter as, I believe, any heroic fable, it is so simple as to be easily comprehended in one view. And it has this peculiar excellency, that every incident of the almost infinite variety which the author has contrived to introduce into it, contributes, some way or other, to bring on the catastrophe, which is so artfully wrought up, and brought about by a change of fortune, so sudden and surprising, that it gives the reader all the pleasure of a well written tragedy or comedy. And, therefore, as I hold the invention and the composition of the fable to be the chief beauty of every poem, I must be of opinion, that Mr. Fielding was one of the greatest poetical geniuses of his age."¹²¹

Farther on, Monboddó pays a tribute to Fielding's "wit" (*i.e.*, "the uncommon turn given to the thought . . . which

¹²⁰ *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, III, 134-135.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, III, 298 note.

otherwise would be nothing but plain sense"), saying that there is "no less wit than manners and characters" in *Tom Jones*; he will not quote instances, "because they are to be found in every page of the work."¹²² And in still another place he says: "I do not know any work in English, nor indeed any work, in which there is more humour, as well as wit, than in . . . *Tom Jones*. All the characters in it are characters of humour, that is, of the ridiculous kind, except that of Mr. Allworthy, Jones himself, Sophia, and Bliffl, who is a complete villain, and, perhaps, two or three more; but he has taken care never to mix his wit with his humour; for all the wit in the piece is for himself, or, at least he does not put it into the mouth of his characters of humour."¹²³ Lord Monboddo, though eccentric (he scandalized his own generation by suggesting that men were derived from monkeys!), was not only an eminent magistrate but a Greek scholar and a rhetorician of considerable prominence. His praise of Fielding in *The Origin and Progress of Language* was significant of the fact that learned men were now deigning to regard him as worthy of scholarly consideration. Frequently quoted, it was influential in bringing about a higher appreciation of the novelist's works.

Less enthusiastic than Monboddo, but notable as coming from the celebrated master of Tunbridge School, was the criticism of Fielding by the Rev. Vicesimus Knox. "The cultivated genius of Fielding," he declares,¹²⁴ in his *Essays* (1777), "entitles him to a high rank among the classics. His works exhibit a series of pictures drawn with all the descriptive fidelity of a Hogarth. They are highly entertaining, and will always be read with pleasure." Speaking as a schoolmaster, Knox admits that Fielding occasionally discloses "scenes, which may corrupt a mind unseasoned by experience";¹²⁵ even Richardson was not, he felt, in this respect unexceptionable.

¹²² *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, III, 328-329.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, III, 347-348.

¹²⁴ Knox's *Essays*, new ed., London, 1782, I, 69.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 69.

Novel-reading was not for children anyway; for a boy "will not study old Lilly, while he can read Pamela and Tom Jones." On the other hand, older people "may always find agreeable refreshment, after severer study, in the amusing pages"¹²⁶ of Fielding, who as a writer of fiction "yields to few in the description of manners."¹²⁷ Knox evidently regards him in the main as a mere entertainer; but it was something for a popular "moral" essayist who was not only a clergyman but a schoolmaster to concede to the author of *Tom Jones* a "high rank among the classics."

Still another notice of Fielding by a writer who was reputed for his learning was the well-known estimate by the grammarian and critic, James Harris,—that "sound sullen scholar,"—which appeared (posthumously) in 1781. In the old days, Harris was acquainted with both the Richardsons and the Fieldings. Back in the year 1745, as Mr. de Castro recently pointed out, Harris had gone bail¹²⁸ with Fielding for Arthur Collier, brother of Jane and Margaret, though it may have been Fielding who paid the money. He is said to have helped Sarah Fielding with her translation of Xenophon and to have contributed some pieces to her *Familiar Letters*; and it has been surmised that he may have made some slight contribution to *The Covent-Garden Journal*. No doubt he thought he was doing very well by his former acquaintance when he casually mentioned "a witty Friend of mine, who . . . used pleasantly, tho' perhaps rather freely, to damn the man, who invented *Fifth Acts*"; and added as a footnote:

So said the celebrated HENRY FIELDING, who was a respectable person both by Education and Birth, having been bred at *Eton School and Leyden*, and being lineally descended from an Earl of *Denbigh*.

His JOSEPH ANDREWS and TOM JONES may be called *Master-pieces* in the COMIC EPOPEE, which none since have

¹²⁶ Knox's *Essays*, I, 71.

¹²⁷ "Winter Evenings," No. CXIV (in *The British Essayists*, edited by Berguer, London, 1823, XLIV, 108).

¹²⁸ *Notes and Queries*, London, 12 S., II, 106 (August 5, 1916).

equalled, tho' multitudes have imitated; and which he was peculiarly qualified to write in the manner he did, both from his *Life*, his *Learning*, and his *Genius*.

Had his *Life* been *less irregular* (for irregular it was, and spent in a promiscuous intercourse with persons of *all ranks*) his *Pictures of Human kind* had neither been so *various*, nor so *natural*.

Had he possessed less of *Literature*, he could not have infused such a spirit of *Classical Elegance*.

Had his *Genius* been less fertile in *Wit and Humour*, he could not have maintained that *uninterrupted Pleasantry*, which never suffers his Reader to feel fatigue.¹²⁹

This tribute to the novelist's "learning" and "classical elegance," coming from a man who had a reputation for scholarship, was a notable addition to Fielding criticism, even though accompanied by a manifest and priggish disapprobation of that author's alleged "promiscuous intercourse with persons of *all ranks*."

Another learned man of note (in Dr. Parr's opinion "no critic of his day excelled him") who delighted in Fielding was Dr. Burney's friend, the Rev. Thomas Twining, translator of Aristotle's *Treatise on Poetry*. From the time when he had "just read" the reference to Blifil and Black George in *The Letters of Junius*, October 6, 1771,¹³⁰ to the end of the century, April 10, 1799, when he referred to Mrs. Slipslop's "figure of *ironing*,"¹³¹ Twining's enthusiasm is apparent. On October 27, 1782, he wrote his brother that his "*present readings*" were "Plato, Aristotle, and Tom Jones."¹³² It is inter-

¹²⁹ Harris's "Philological Inquiries," in *Works*, 1781, III, 163-164.

¹³⁰ *Recreations . . . of a Country Clergyman*, London, 1882, p. 22 (letter of October 6, 1771); p. 234 (letter of April 10, 1799). Other references are: January 27, 1776 (to *Joseph Andrews*), p. 33; March 14, 1783 (to *Tom Jones*), p. 118.

¹³¹ Francis Grose, the antiquarian, devoted his twenty-second *Grumbler* to an essay "On Slip-Slopping"—taking his cue from "a character humourously delineated by Fielding, in one of the most popular of his novels."—*The Olio*, London, 1792.

¹³² *Selections from Papers of the Twining Family*, London, 1887, p. 109.

esting to observe what the learned translator of Aristotle has to say about one of Richardson's characters. In the course of his rendering of the *Treatise* he asks, "Is not the *Lovelace* of Richardson . . . more out of nature, more improbable, than the *Caliban* of Shakspeare? The latter is, at least, consistent, I can *imagine* such a monster as Caliban: I never could imagine such a man as *Lovelace*."¹³³ On Fielding's characters, Twining made no such strictures; and he hugely enjoyed their creator's witty sallies. Harris's story to the effect that Henry Fielding "used 'to execrate the man who invented fifth acts'"¹³⁴ so caught his fancy that he gave it place in his notes to the *Treatise* itself.

A greater lover of the novelist than Twining was that other translator of Aristotle, Henry J. Pye, the laureate, author of *A Commentary Illustrative of the Poetic of Aristotle*. The idea of examining Fielding's prose epics in the light of Aristotelian criticism was not a new one; Beattie, taking a hint from Murphy, had asserted that both *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* would stand the test. But it was the author of the *Commentary* who reversed the process and endeavored to establish the validity of the famous treatise on poetry by reference not merely to the classics but to the works of fiction and particularly to those of Fielding. We are not here concerned with the many allusions to specific characters and incidents of the great novels which abound in the *Commentary*. And the author's performance, it must be confessed, is not equal to his promise. When, for example, he tells us that in the "catastrophe" of *Tom Jones* "the behavior of Sophia on her meeting" with her lover, her "obstinate refusal of him, and her extraordinary mode of afterwards consenting to an immediate marriage with him" are "perfectly unnatural," we prefer to side with the creator of Sophia rather than with her critic. But Pye's observations are well worth exhuming. He has read his Fielding carefully, discriminatingly, enthusiastically; he boldly takes

¹³³ Twining's translation of Aristotle's *Treatise on Poetry*, second ed., 1812, I, 184 note. The first edition appeared in 1789.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 41.

issue not only with Bishop Hurd—that disparager of prose fiction in general—but with that disparager of Fielding and eulogist of Richardson, Dr. Johnson; and he is courageous enough to say—thereby furnishing matter for speculation to Coleridge, no doubt—that the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, though a “masterpiece” of plot-building, is in some respects “by no means of equal merit” with *Tom Jones*.¹³⁵

Pye, the laureate, long since buried deep in oblivion, was even then a lesser light; but the name of Dr. Joseph Warton was luminous for several decades yet to follow. Nothing shows more clearly the change that had come about in the estimation of Fielding since his own day than the fact that Warton, who, on his visit to Fielding back in 1746 was “inexpressibly diverted,” took occasion a generation later to pay a tribute to the novelist’s erudition. In the first volume of his *Essay on Pope*, in 1756, Warton had referred to both Cervantes and Le Sage, but, in spite of his admiration, made no mention of Fielding; in the second volume, 1782, he wrote: It “may be worth observing, that the chief of those who have excelled in works of wit and humour, have been men of extensive *learning*. We may instance in *Lucian, Cervantes, Quevedo, Rabelais, Arbuthnot, Fielding, and Butler*.”¹³⁶ It is true that Warton found it “not easy to say, why Fielding should call his *Joseph Andrews*, excellent as it is, an imitation of *this manner* [*i.e.*, the “serious” manner of Cervantes]”;¹³⁷ it is also true that in making his oft-quoted pronouncement that the madness of Clementina rivaled that of Lear, he paid a higher compliment to Richardson than he ever accorded Fielding; but in his edition of Pope’s *Works* in 1797, a few years before his death, he went so far as to declare that Fielding was the rival of Jonathan Swift. Objecting to that slur of Swift’s (see the

¹³⁵ Pye’s *Commentary*, London, 1792, p. 358. For other references see pp. 98, 100, 182, 279, 309, 313, 314, 321, 335, 357, 373, 437, 447, 454, 459, 463, 562.

¹³⁶ Warton, J., *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, London, 1782, II, pp. 403-404.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 404.

Rapsody), which had long done duty as a footnote in editions of Pope, Warton added this comment: "Little did Swift imagine, that this very Fielding would hereafter equal him in works of humour, and excell him in drawing and supporting characters, and in the artful conduct and plan of a Comic Epopée."¹⁸⁸

When men like Beattie, Monboddo, and Warton found it worth their while to praise Fielding in works of learning, it is not strange that the popular and elegant Hugh Blair—who feared that novels as a class might be considered "too insignificant" to deserve "particular notice"—was compelled to include a brief mention of him in his *Rhetoric*, published in 1783. "Mr. Fielding's novels," runs the passage, "are highly distinguished for their humour; a humour which, if not of the most refined and delicate kind, is original, and peculiar to himself. The characters which he draws are lively and natural, and marked with the strokes of a bold pencil. The general scope of his stories is favourable to humanity and goodness of heart; and in *Tom Jones*, his greatest work, the artful conduct of the fable, and the subserviency of all the incidents to the winding up of the whole, deserve much praise."¹⁸⁹ Of Richardson, Blair said, "The most moral of all our novel writers is Richardson"; and for more than a generation children in school were catechized upon this point. As we turn the pages of an ancient and honorable copy of this book, which was the most popular rhetoric for several decades, how odd it seems to find among the questions at the chapter-end, "Who is the most moral of all our novel writers?" and to picture our ancestors dutifully answering, "Richardson." But Blair had done his best by Fielding; and his influence—whatever we may think of him now—is not to be despised. While occupying the chair of rhetoric at Edinburgh for nearly a quarter of a century, he had won so high a place in criticism, that, when

¹⁸⁸ *The Works of Pope*, edited by Joseph Warton and others, London, 1797, V, 161.

¹⁸⁹ Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric*, London, 1834, pp. 509-510. Printed "verbatim from the original copy."

his *Lectures* were published, they were accepted, as a recent writer has put it, "as the supreme code of the laws of taste."

Finally—to go a little beyond the limits of this chapter—came that sonorous praise of Gibbon's which has reverberated down through generations; at last Fielding had won a distinction which was on a par with the best of those which had been conferred upon Richardson. So highly did the great historian esteem the novelist that in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* he referred to him in a footnote as a "great master," whose *Journey from this World to the Next*—which in his opinion "may be considered as the history of human nature"¹⁴⁰—he was "almost tempted to quote" as an authority. The splendid passage which everyone knows, however, is to be found not in the *Decline and Fall* but in the *Autobiography*. Our "immortal" Fielding's "Romance of Tom Jones, that exquisite picture of human manners," he declared, "will outlive the palace of the Escorial, and the imperial Eagle of the house of Austria."¹⁴¹ This is in *Memoir D*, written, according to Murray, in the years "1790-91." While composing *Memoir E* ("March 2, 1791"),¹⁴² Gibbon indulges the hope that "one day his mind will be familiar to the grandchildren of those who are yet unborn." He was thinking, he tells us in a note, of that "first of ancient or modern Romances," *Tom Jones*, and of the "beautiful" invocation to Fame, in which "this proud sentiment, this feast of fancy" was "enjoyed by the Genius of Fielding."¹⁴³ Even before this splendid eulogy was—by Lord Sheffield—made public property, the great historian had made at least two converts. His lordship's vivacious daughter, Maria Josepha, who according to the story assisted her

¹⁴⁰ J. B. Bury's edition of *The Decline and Fall*, London, 1897, III, 363.

¹⁴¹ *The Memoirs of . . . Edward Gibbon*, edited by G. B. Hill, London, 1900, p. 5.

¹⁴² *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, edited by John Murray, second ed., London, 1897, pp. 346-347, 347 note, 419.

¹⁴³ *The Memoirs of . . . Edward Gibbon*, edited by G. B. Hill, pp. 243, 243 note.

father in piecing together the manuscript, wrote on February 2, 1794, "Aunt Serena and I read Tom Jones by turns; but I am afraid Aunt's turn comes oftenest and lasts longest."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd*, London, etc., 1896, p. 268.

CHAPTER X

The End of the Century

1784-1800

TO have your name mentioned by Gibbon, declared Thackeray, is like having it emblazoned on the dome of St. Peter's; but this statement, though true enough ultimately, does not exactly describe the situation at the end of the eighteenth century. Even then, of course, Gibbon's praise of Fielding was an important influence. In a letter dated October 7, 1788, Lord Chedworth, for example, wonders that he "was so stupid as never to read" Fielding's *Journey from this World to the Next*, until he came across Gibbon's allusion to the work as "the romance of a great master, which may be considered as the history of human nature." "Fielding," Lord Chedworth continues, "was certainly a great master of human nature; he ranks very high in my estimate: far, far above Sterne: as a moralist he may be compared with Johnson; I mean for knowledge of the human heart, and I am yet to be convinced that he yields to him; perhaps to few writers in the language. The first indisputably is Shakespeare."¹ It must be remembered that to many persons at the century-end Gibbon was a forbidden writer.² Later still, Elizabeth Barrett in her girlhood was commanded by her father not to look into the works of Gibbon or into Fielding's *Tom Jones*, to which injunction, she says, she was literally obedient, reading instead the equally "irreligious" Hume.³

¹ Lord Chedworth's *Letters*, Norwich, 1840, p. iii.

² It is significant that a certain "R. R.," who reviewed the *Miscellaneous Works* in *The European Magazine* (XXX, 23) in July, 1796, transcribes the passage about the "nobility of the Spencers" and the *Faery Queen* but utterly ignores the part concerning Fielding and *Tom Jones*!

³ *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett*, New York and London, 1899, I, 404.

We see, then, that even when the great honor of being eulogized by Gibbon came to Fielding, that distinction was not immediately and widely known to the world, though at the end of another generation Thomas Dibdin, the bibliographer, made the statement that the *Autobiography* had been "perhaps the most popular production, of its kind, of modern times."⁴

Meanwhile, in the closing years of the century, the old battles raged over the respective merits of Fielding and Richardson, with occasional debates on the subject of Fielding and Smollett. Compared with the popularity of Richardson, however, that of Smollett, in spite of his Scotch supporters, was not at all formidable. "About 1780," writes Andrew Lang, "the vendors of children's books issued abridgments of 'Tom Jones' and 'Pamela,' 'Clarissa' and 'Joseph Andrews,' adapted to the needs of infant minds. It was a curious enterprise, certainly, but the booksellers do not seem to have produced 'Every Boy's Roderick Random,' or 'Peregrine Pickle for the Young.' Smollett, in short, is less known than Fielding."⁵ Still Smollett had his friends, chief among whom were Dr. John Moore, author of *Zeluco*; Anderson, his biographer; his old friend Alexander Carlyle; Lord Gardenstone; Campbell, the poet; and, most partisan of all, William Godwin.

With Dr. John Moore the case rests between Fielding and Smollett. Despite the fact that he is Smollett's editor, and grants to that author "strong masculine humour, just observations on life, and a great variety of original characters," Moore does not claim for him "invention";⁶ Fielding, on the other hand, he commends not merely for "powers" of "invention," but for Cervantic "style and manner" (in *Joseph Andrews*), "knowledge of human nature," and "skilful plot."⁷ In the opinion of Alexander Carlyle, the Scotch Presbyterian divine, Fielding "only excelled" Smollett "in giving

⁴ *The Library Companion*, second ed., London, 1825, p. 548.

⁵ Lang's *Adventures among Books*, London, etc., 1905, pp. 175-176.

⁶ "The Life of Dr. Smollett," in *Works*, London, 1797, I, clxxix.

⁷ "A View of the . . . Progress of Romance," in *Works*, I, lxxxix,

a dramatic story to his novels," and "was inferior to him in the true comic vein."⁸ The eccentric Lord Gardenstone went so far as to say that for "the talent of drawing a natural and original character, Dr. Smollet of all English writers, approaches nearest to a resemblance of the inimitable Shakespeare."⁹ Here and there in occasional verse his lordship referred to Fielding; *e.g.*,

FIELDING, and twenty others, tell us,
That long since an Olympic race—¹⁰

an imitation of Horace (I, i); and a line in a poem called "The Newspaper":

Goldsmith how slow, how rapid Fielding wrote;¹¹

but he severely criticized a number of Fielding's plays,¹² and never did he become so eloquent over *Tom Jones* as over

. . . Random's tuneful reed.¹³

Campbell, the poet, was, in his earlier years, a stout champion of Smollett, whose grotesque characters used to throw him into "paroxysms of laughter," and whose occasional romantic scenes were much to his liking. Everyone has heard of the celebrated Fielding-Smollett disputation between Campbell and Crabbe at Holland House, which lasted "the better part of a morning," and in which neither gained the victory;¹⁴ but a fact of still greater importance has never received sufficient publicity. Realizing at last the greatness of Fielding, and desiring to make amends for his boyish prejudice against him,

⁸ *Autobiography of . . . Alexander Carlyle*, Edinburgh and London, 1860, p. 265.

⁹ Lord Gardenstone's *Miscellanies*, second ed., Edinburgh, 1792, p. 194.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 151, 155.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁴ Huchon, R., *George Crabbe and his Times*, London, 1907, p. 394. It was the morning of June 26, 1817.

Campbell wrote, "I had not then mind enough to grasp and appreciate the thoughts of that admirable writer."¹⁵ More venturesome than most of his contemporaries was Robert Anderson, who, in his account of Smollett in the *British Poets* (1794),¹⁶ asserted that "*Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Humphry Clinker* . . . undoubtedly . . . rival the productions of the moral, the pathetic, but tiresome Richardson, and the ingenious but diffuse Fielding, with all his knowledge of the human heart." Conceding that Fielding "repeatedly displays a thorough acquaintance with nature," he declares that "after perusing . . . the common place introductory discussions and diffuse narrative of 'Tom Jones,' 'Joseph Andrews,' and 'Amelia,' we never quit them with such reluctance as we feel on closing the pages of Smollett."¹⁷ This telltale argument, which needs no comment, is included here for the influence which it apparently exerted later upon Scott, who, according to his own testimony, wrote his famous defense of Smollett with Anderson's *Life* before him.

Strangely enough, the most severe attack on Fielding by the adherents of Smollett was made by the Englishman, William Godwin, whose puzzling and equivocal attitude toward him now demands our attention. Endeavoring in his *Enquirer* to support the thesis that the "ordinary standard of elegant composition at the present day [1797]" was higher than it had formerly been, Godwin deliberately set about to disparage Fielding's style.¹⁸ After a prefatory concession to the effect that *Tom Jones* is "certainly one of the most admirable performances in the world," that the "structure of the story perhaps has never been equalled," and that there is no work which

¹⁵ *Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell*, edited by W. Beattie, New York, 1850, I, 67-68.

¹⁶ See also Anderson's prefatory "Life" of Smollett in *Miscellaneous Works*, second ed., Edinburgh, 1800, I, ciii.

¹⁷ In the "Life" of Smollett prefixed to "The Poetical Works" (in *Poets of Great Britain*, Vol. X), Edinburgh, 1794, p. 946.

¹⁸ *The Enquirer*, London, 1797, Part II, Essay XII ("Of English Style"), Section 6, pp. 455, 462, 464, 467, 470.

"more frequently or more happily excites emotions of the most elevated and delicious generosity," Godwin begins his tirade. In his opinion Fielding's style is "glaringly inferior to the constituent parts of the work. It is feeble, costive and slow. It cannot boast of periods elegantly turned or delicately pointed." Furthermore, though *Tom Jones* is "interspersed with long discourses of religious or moral instruction," these "have no novelty of conception or impressive sagacity of remark, and are little superior to what any reader might hear at the next parish-church." "The general turn of the work," continues Godwin, "is intended to be sarcastic and ironical"; but the "style of irony, or rather buffoonery, in which nearly the whole work is written" is a "hide-bound sportiveness," which is "hard, pedantic and unnatural." It is true that the author's "efforts" in the novel of *Tom Jones*, "in the character of Parson Adams," and in "a few other instances, are exquisitely meritorious"; but "when Fielding delights us, he appears to go out of himself. The general character of his genius, will probably be found to be jejune and puerile. For the truth of this remark, we may appeal, in particular, to his comedies." Then he adds, "Everything that is the reverse of this may be affirmed of Smollet," in whose "lightest sketches, there is nothing frivolous, trifling and effeminate." It may be imagined that what the frigid and unhumorous Godwin really objected to in Fielding was a lack of "elegance" and "gravity"; as we read on in the essay we come upon this statement: "It is the office of the poet and the novelist to adorn the style of their characters, and to give to real life the most impressive form." Incidentally that singular *crux* in Hazlitt's criticism (1815)—to the effect that the only particular in which Fielding is deficient is style—may possibly be explained in part by the great admiration of that critic for William Godwin.

Thus Smollett had his followers, who, as we shall see, increased in number at a subsequent period; but Andrew Lang's statement still holds—at least, if we may believe the testimony of an eminent Frenchman. Chateaubriand, who lived in Eng-

land during the last decade of the century, tells us that during this period: "Richardson dormoit oublié, ses compatriotes trouvoient dans son style des traces de la société inférieure, au sein de laquelle il avoit vécu. Fielding se soutenoit bien; Sterne, entrepreneur d'originalité, étoit passé."¹⁹ Smollett he does not even mention. Although what he says of the lack of popularity of all these writers is unquestionably exaggerated, there is some truth in the estimate. Fielding was gaining; Richardson, losing; while Smollett was held in less esteem than either. As a matter of fact, Richardson was very far from being "oublié"; for some of the most glowing praise of him belongs to the end of the century. In the Rev. Martin Sherlock—whom Walpole pleasantly notices in his letters,²⁰ though he cannot agree with him in the pronouncement which follows—Richardson found one of his most fervid encomiasts. This reverend gentleman challenges the "universe" to "name" him "three men, chosen from all ages and all countries, equal²¹ to Newton, Shakspeare, and the author of *Clarissa*"; declares that the "greatest effort of genius that perhaps was ever made, was forming the plan" of that book, and the accomplishment next in rank, "executing that plan"; and finds "whole volumes" in Richardson that "it is impossible to read without crying and sobbing from beginning to end."²² Extravagant as this outburst seems to us now, it was not so regarded at the time; many years later John Nichols esteemed the passage so highly that he gave it a commanding place in the account of Richardson which he prepared for his *Literary Anecdotes*. A greater man than Sherlock—Isaac Disraeli—wrote in the same vein when he asserted, in his *Literary Character*, that "a Homer and a Richardson, like Nature, open a volume large as life itself—embracing a circuit of human

¹⁹ *Œuvres Complètes de . . . Chateaubriand*, Paris, 1837, xxxiv, 282 ("Essai sur la Littérature Anglaise").

²⁰ Walpole's *Letters*, edited by Mrs. Toynbee, Oxford, 1904, XII, 169, 170.

²¹ *New Letters from an English Traveller*, London, 1781, p. 204.

²² *Letters on Several Subjects*, London, 1781, I, 22; 153-154.

existence!"²³ And, if we may allude to the passage once again, the celebrated Joseph Warton, whose prestige was unquestioned, regarded the madness of Clementina in Richardson's *Grandison* as rivaling that of Shakespeare's *Lear*. Still, even the devotees of Richardson were sensible of his waning popularity. Martin Sherlock cried out against a certain "coldness" toward his favorite, and found it "astonishing" how "many men of parts I have met with who speak of him with contempt."²⁴ Disraeli protests that the "censure which the Shakespeare of novelists has incurred . . . is extremely unjust."²⁵ And that veteran campaigner, Miss Anna Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield," becoming alarmed at the turn of popular favor, abjured "the coarse unfeeling taste," of those who preferred "Fielding's romances" to the immortal volumes of Richardson,²⁶ "the highest efforts of genius in our language, next to Shakespeare's plays."

One of the most notable and enthusiastic Fieldingites was the dramatist Richard Cumberland, whose *Henry* (1795)—which will be discussed farther on—was destined to be the only elaborate imitation of a Fielding novel to survive entire oblivion. As early as 1786, in his *Observer*, Cumberland had spoken his mind so boldly that all the Richardsonians were up in arms. Miss Seward, for example, in a letter to that *fervente* of Richardson, Mrs. Piozzi, February 13, 1789, declares that she never wishes "to read a novel written by one who has proclaimed . . . *Clarissa* . . . inimical to the right formation of the female mind."²⁷ *Clarissa*, Cumberland had asserted, though modeled "upon the most studied plan of morality," was a most unnatural fiction, inasmuch as what the celebrated heroine "is made to do, and what she is allowed to omit," were

²³ *The Literary Character*, London, 1818, p. 169. In his "Preface" Disraeli says that the first "sketch" of this work appeared "in 1795."

²⁴ *Letters on Several Subjects*, I, 153-154.

²⁵ *Curiosities of Literature*, new ed., London, 1866, p. 199.

²⁶ *Letters of Anna Seward*, Edinburgh, 1811, I, 293 (letter of May 10, 1787).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 244 (letter LIX).

"equally out of the regions of nature"; in short, Richardson's masterpiece was "one of the books, which a prudent parent will put under interdiction." Cumberland admits that "perhaps" the "epistolary mode of writing may be best adapted" to "pathetic" themes; but Fielding, he thinks, "pursued the more natural mode" of telling a story; and, though—at this time—he regards the introduction of initial chapters as an unsafe "practice" for imitators, he believes that Fielding "has executed" these "so pleasantly, that we are reconciled to the interruption." To conclude, the "inimitable novel of *The Foundling*" is "universally allowed," says Cumberland, to be "the most perfect work of its sort in ours, or probably any other language."²⁸

At the end of the century, debate over questions of fiction was much more general than ever before; violent attacks on the novel and spirited defenses of it occupied many a paragraph in periodical or pamphlet. The day was past when a Hurd could discourse upon romance and ignore both Richardson and Fielding.²⁹ In 1785 there appeared an extended treatise in English (apparently the first of its kind) on the history of fiction; this was *The Progress of Romance*, by Mrs. Clara Reeve, who, by the way, had always been a great admirer of Richardson. In her *Champion of Virtue*, some years before, she had exclaimed, "Happy the writer" who "like Richardson" can not only "excite the attention," but also "direct it to some useful, or at least innocent end";³⁰ and before her *Progress of Romance* was printed she went over the proof sheets with Richardson's daughter, with whom, she says, she has "lived many years in intimate friendship."³¹

²⁸ "The Observer," No. XXVII, in *The British Essayists*, edited by Chalmers, London, 1817, xxxviii, 180, 181, 182.

²⁹ See an *Essay on Novels*, Edinburgh, 1793, by Alexander Thomson, who defends the genre against Bishop Hurd.

³⁰ *The Champion of Virtue*, London, 1777, p. iv.

³¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LVI, 117 (February, 1786). For the account of the quarrel between Mrs. Reeve and Miss Seward regarding Richardson's novels, see this article and Miss Seward's (LVI, 15-17).

The characters of Mrs. Reeve's little dialogue are two rather prim ladies, Euphrasia and Sophronia, and an equally sedate and deferential gentleman, Hortensius. After both ladies have warmly commended Richardson, Euphrasia says: "The next Author . . . whom *Hortensius* feared I should forget, is *Henry Fielding*, Esq., whose works are universally known and admired." The ladies are then made to point out Fielding's faults; Hortensius, to call attention to his virtues. Euphrasia thinks Fielding "superior" to Richardson in "wit and learning," but "inferior" in "morals and exemplary characters"; she is afraid *Tom Jones* may be bad for "young men of warm passions." To this the other spinster agrees, saying, "There are many objectionable scenes in *Fielding's* works"; and the dialogue thus proceeds:

HORTENSIOUS. . . . I allow there is some foundation for your remarks, nevertheless in all *Fielding's* works, virtue has always the superiority she ought to have, and challenges the honours that are justly due to her, the general tenor of them is in her favour, and it were happy for us, if our language had no greater cause of complaint in her behalf.

EUPHRASIA. There we will agree with you. . . .

HORTENSIOUS. . . . Fielding's *Amelia* is in much lower estimation than his *Joseph Andrews*, or *Tom Jones*; which have both received the stamp of public applause. . . . "The Genius of *Cervantes* (says Dr. *Smollet*) was transfused into the Novels of *Fielding*, who painted the characters, and ridiculed the follies of life, with equal strength, humour and propriety."

EUPHRASIA. We are willing to join with you in paying the tribute due to *Fielding's* Genius, humour, and knowledge of mankind, but [getting in a parting shot] he certainly painted human nature as *it is*, rather than as *it ought to be*.³²

Despite the fact that she is working somewhat against the grain, Mrs. Reeve bears testimony that in 1785 Fielding's works were "universally known and admired." Though her

³² *The Progress of Romance*, I, 139-141. "Zeluco" Moore, in *his Progress of Romance*, ignored Mrs. Reeve's volume (to the surprise of Anderson); and so, in 1814, did Dunlop.

own preference is for Richardson—she presumably agrees with Euphrasia in regarding works of “wit” as possessing “only” a “secondary merit”—she implies that among the men, at least, of that period, Fielding was highly praised for his wit, humor, satire, character-drawing, and knowledge of mankind. Significantly enough, the novels which she speaks of (through Hortensius) as having received the “stamp of public applause” are *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*—*Amelia*, as usual, was in “much lower estimation.”

In this account of the rival novelists Fielding had nearly succeeded in holding his own; indeed, evidences of the increasingly high regard he now enjoyed are clearly manifest. Among the better-known writers of fiction, to be sure, there is less often acknowledgment of esteem and indebtedness than might be expected. During the closing years of the century the novel was chiefly in the hands of women, who, as will be seen in our next chapter, were becoming somewhat reticent about the author of *Tom Jones*; the revolutionary writers—Godwin, Holcroft, and others—presumably found Fielding too orthodox for their liking; while the Gothic romancers, dealing with the marvelous as a main staple, flew in the face of his injunction against ghosts, and, on the sentimental side, aligned themselves with Richardson. The romance of terror, however, fell into such absurdities that contemporary satirists harked back to the good old days of sense. Notable among these was Colman the Younger, who tells us:

Time was (when honest Fielding writ)
Tales full of nature, character, and wit
Were reckoned most delicious boiled and roast;
But stomachs are so cloyed with novel-feeding,
Folks get a vitiated taste in reading,
And want that strong provocative, a ghost.³³

Still, in spite of its vogue, the Gothic story dislodged neither

³³ George Colman the Younger, “My Nightgown and Slippers,” in *Broad Grins*, London, n.d. [1872], p. 70. Preface to first edition, March 21, 1797.

Richardson nor Fielding from popular favor. "If we wish for delicate and refined sentiment," runs No. XV (1787) of the *Olla Podrida*, we "recur to Grandison and Clarissa; if we would see the world more perhaps as it is, than as it should be, we have Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones."³⁴ And the growing popularity of Fielding is reflected in the following complaint in No. XVI, in which we are told that "mixed characters alone come home to the minds of the multitude. The angelic qualities of a Grandison, or an Harlowe, are reflected but by the hearts of a few solitary individuals, whilst those of Jones find a never failing mirror in the better half of mankind."³⁵ During the same year, Oulton, the Irish playwright, stigmatizes, in *The Busy Body*, the novel of letters as "so very hackney'd";³⁶ while in another number (No. II, January 4, 1787) he says that by "way of recommending a book, it is usual to say in a puff, *written in imitation of Fielding, Shenstone, Tristram Shandy, & c.*"³⁷ The author of *Letters to Honoria and Marianne*, in a defense of novels as a *genre*, makes a plea for other productions "besides those excellent ones, stamped by the names of a Richardson, a Fielding."³⁸ And in still another performance, *The Amicable Quixote*, Fielding is again given the preference: "After the production of those immortal fictions": *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and "the histories of Fielding," who "can hope to obtain even a leaf of that laurel conferred upon the genius and wit of so many ages?" In the book itself the characters refer to Joseph Andrews and to Tom Jones, and there is a quotation from *Amelia*.³⁹ It was thus a case of nip and tuck between the rival novelists, though Fielding was now more often in the lead than he had been previously.

In the long since forgotten verse of the day there are refer-

³⁴ *The Olla Podrida*, second ed., London, 1788.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, No. XVI, June 30, 1787.

³⁶ Oulton, W. C., *The Busy Body*, London, *n.d.*, II, 148.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 32.

³⁸ *Letters to Honoria and Marianne*, London, 1784, II, 18.

³⁹ *The Amicable Quixote*, London, 1788, Preface, p. v.

ences enough to show that the name and fame of Fielding were of value to the paragraphers and hackwriters of the century-end, not only in London but in far-away Edinburgh. In the latter place, Andrew Shirrefs tells the public in his "Shop-Bill" that he has among his goods,

Tom Jones, Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy,
Songs set to music, as Blyth Sandy;⁴⁰

and in London itself, in the political literature of the day, Fielding was not infrequently called upon to point a paragraph or furnish an analogy. "An Expostulation with John Bull, in favor of the Marquis of Lansdowne" refers to

Great JEKYLL, that man so renowned at the Bar,
as

More witty than FIELDING, more learned than PARR;⁴¹

and a few years before there appeared in a section of *The Rolliad* entitled "Political Miscellanies" the following "Theatrical Intelligence Extraordinary"—namely, that in the new "comic opera of TOM JONES" the part of Blifil has been allotted to Mr. Pitt; and that of Squire Western to Mr. Rolle; while Lord Thurlow, the Chancellor, will enact the "King of the Gypsies."⁴²

At a time when *Tom Jones* was sufficiently familiar to a general audience to be used by political lampooners, naturally enough, a new crop of professed imitations made their appearance. To begin with, there was another reissue, in 1786, of *The History of Tom Jones . . . in his Married State*.⁴³ Three

⁴⁰ Andrew Shirrefs's *Poems*, Edinburgh, 1790, p. 250. The poem is dated January 1, 1785.

⁴¹ *The Times*, London, February 16, 1793 (as quoted by Ashton, J., in *Old Times a Picture of Social Life at the End of the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1885, p. 286).

⁴² *The Rolliad, in Two Parts; Probationary Odes . . . and Political Miscellanies*, London, 1795, pp. 94-95 (of "Political Miscellanies").

⁴³ Printed for J. Barker; the original edition of 1750 (published in November, 1749) was printed for J. Robinson.

years later came the *Memoirs of Charles Townley*,⁴⁴ in three volumes—of no importance except as an example of Fielding's influence. This was followed in 1791 by George Brewer's *History of Tom Weston. A Novel, after the Manner of Tom Jones*. In his introduction the author of this production hopes that "this imperfect little work," which endeavors to "restore" to the novel a "chaste and natural colouring," will be welcomed by "those few whose just taste still brings to their remembrance" the "inimitable masters," Fielding and Smollett. It is to be feared that the writer was disappointed in his great hope; for his book has few marks of excellence either as an imitation or as an original. Equally worthless, apparently, was a four-volume imitation of *Tom Jones*, entitled *Ned Evans*, which, as we gather from a letter of Charles Lamb's, was reviewed by young Samuel Taylor Coleridge⁴⁵ for *The Critical*, in November, 1796. "The characters and adventures of Ned Evans," runs the notice, "bear occasionally too close a resemblance to Fielding's inimitable Tom Jones; and Molly Price is a faint copy of Moll Seagrim."

Of all the direct imitations early or late of Fielding, the only one of any importance, as has been observed, was Cumberland's *Henry*, which appeared four years after the *History of Tom Weston*. Long before the publication of this book, the author had exerted himself in defense of Fielding, whom he always preferred to Richardson. Like Sheridan he had turned his friendship to good account, though unlike him he had always been hearty in his praise. His early comedy, *The Brothers* (1769), was suggested by *Tom Jones*; as was also *The Natural Son*, the "dialogue" and "story" of which, according to a contemporary critic (see *The London Magazine*, December, 1784), are "not so finely and naturally blended as in Fielding's wonderful Foundling." At last, in 1795, notwithstanding the perils which, as he said in *The Observer*, would attend an imitation of the prolegomenous chapters, Cumberland brought out what he intended to be a replica of

⁴⁴ *Memoirs of Charles Townley*, London, 1789.

⁴⁵ See E. V. Lucas's edition of Lamb's *Works*, London, 1905, VI, 25.

Fielding, perfect in every detail. After the manner of his great master he pours into initial essays many observations upon life which had come to him during a long career; and though these little discourses are far removed from Fielding's wisdom and charm, they contain a good deal of interesting matter, particularly concerning the subject of fiction. In his opinion a novel is a "dilated comedy." Smollett he describes as a "rough driver" who is "rather severe on his cattle"; while Richardson is a "well-meaning, civil soul," who had a "soft simpering address, that took mightily with the ladies." Whether the epistolary form is "more popular" than the third-person form, he cannot say; but he thinks it runs the risk of being "stiff, tedious, and pedantic." Though he fears that even "the inimitable composition of the *Foundling* is fading away in some of its tints," "the hand of the master as a correct delineator of nature will be traced to all posterity," and the book will "hold its rank amongst the foremost of that class which enrolls the names of Cervantes, Rabelais, Le Sage, Voltaire, Rousseau, Richardson, Smollett, Johnson, Sterne, and some others." He regards the story of the *Man of the Hill* as "an excrescence"; and he believes an author should avoid "speaking in his own person"; but he boldly declares Fielding's "talent for novel writing" to be "unequalled."

Among the poets who were living at the time Cumberland's *Henry* appeared, we find a very different attitude from that of Johnson, Gray, Young, and Shenstone, all of whom in varying degrees were advocates of Richardson. As for *ignes minores*, mention has already been made of the sentimental Hayley, who, sentimentalist as he was, spoke pleasantly of Richardson's competitor; also of Pye, who referred to Fielding as "that inimitable delineator of manners."⁴⁶ The gentle Cowper (who as a young man presumably followed the current numbers of *The Covent-Garden Journal*)⁴⁷ had a high

⁴⁶ Pye, H. J., *Sketches on Various Subjects*, second ed., London, 1797, p. 13.

⁴⁷ "Fielding," wrote Cowper to Lady Hesketh, October 5, 1787, "was the only man who ever attempted to be witty with success in a

opinion of Fielding's wit as an essayist; was fond of quoting from *Tom Jones*⁴⁸ and *Tom Thumb*;⁴⁹ read *Jonathan Wild* aloud to Lady Hesketh, and *Joseph Andrews* to Mrs. Unwin;⁵⁰ and spoke of the Rev. Mr. Unwin as another Parson Adams.⁵¹ In 1795, five years before his death, he referred to a four-volume novel which young Johnson read aloud to him as "a miserable imitation of Fielding's stile."⁵²

Of Crabbe, the Fieldingite, we have already spoken. According to Huchon, "During the winters of 1801 and 1802 Crabbe, incited by his reading, spent his evenings in writing three novels: the first was called *The Widow Grey*, and portrayed a certain Dr. Allison, a 'benevolent humourist,' whose name suggests the Dr. Harrison in Fielding's *Amelia*."⁵³ This production was burned by the poet; but in his verse—note, for example, the clergymen of *The Parish Register*—Fielding's influence may still be seen. Burns, too, acknowledged Fielding's supremacy. As a boy his "bosom favourites were Sterne and Mackenzie"; and, except for a stray volume or two of *Pamela*, neither Richardson nor Fielding crossed his path, it is said, until after he had "commenced author." Eventually, however, after reading Dr. Moore's *Zeluco*, he meditated a "criticism" on "novel writing" which should give a comparative view of Moore, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett in their "different qualities and merits." As he distrusted his ability, the project was never carried out; but from his preliminary outline we may judge that he considered Fielding the

newspaper, and even he could not support it long. But he led the way in his *Covent-Garden Journal*, and a thousand blockheads have followed him."—Cowper's *Correspondence*, edited by T. Wright, London, 1904, III, 165.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 397 (August 12, 1789).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 39 (March 12, 1791).

⁵⁰ *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. L, 753 (April, 1875).

⁵¹ Wright, I, 53.

⁵² *Letters of Lady Hesketh to the Rev. John Johnson*, London [1901], pp. 45, 46.

⁵³ Huchon, René, *Crabbe and his Times*, trans. by F. Clarke, London, 1907, pp. 206-207.

premier novelist.⁵⁴ In a little skit of his on the *fin de siècle* craze for fiction he refers to Richardson also:

O LEAVE novéls, ye Mauchline belles—
Ye're safer at your spinning wheel!
Such witching books are baited hooks
For rakish rooks—like Rob Mossgiel.

Your fine *Tom Jones* and *Grandisons*
They make your youthful fancies reel!
They heat your brains, and fire your veins,
And then you're prey for Rob Mossgiel.⁵⁵

Sentimentalist though he was, Burns held Richardson's characters—those "beings of another sphere"—to be less true to nature than the people of Fielding, who were more to his taste. As we look through his correspondence with Mrs. Dunlop and with his "Clarinda" (Mrs. M'Lehose) we notice that the celebrated novels were a matter of common interest to all three. On receiving Burns's autobiography, Mrs. Dunlop wrote (September 9, 1787) that it had given her "more pleasure than Richardson or Fielding could have afforded me."⁵⁶ And again she asks (March 14, 1788), "Who ever read *Tom Jones* but felt that there are even reasons that vindicate a man's embracing . . . [the profession] of a highwayman . . . where he seems to ennoble it?"⁵⁷ Some time before (January 9, 1788), "Clarinda" had asked, "Did you ever read Fielding's *Amelia*? If you have not, I beg you would. There are scenes in it, tender, domestic scenes, which I have read over and over, with feelings too delightful to describe!"⁵⁸ Burns's reply,

⁵⁴ Heinrich Molenaar's *Robert Burns' Beziehungen zur Literatur*, Erlangen, 1899.

⁵⁵ Henley and Henderson, *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, Edinburgh, 1897, IV, 11 (Farming Memorandum, 1784).

⁵⁶ *Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop*, edited by W. Wallace, New York, 1898, I, 44.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 75-76.

⁵⁸ *The Correspondence between Burns and Clarinda*, Edinburgh, 1843, p. 128. For Burns's letter (January 10, 1788), see p. 131.

which he sent off the very next day, reads as follows: "Booth and Amelia I know well. Your sentiments on that subject . . . are just and noble. 'To be feelingly alive to kindness and to unkindness,' is a charming female character." After making due allowances for the tender relationship which existed between the poet and his "Clarinda," we must believe that he was sincere when he spoke of his appreciation of *Amelia*; the union of humor and pathos in the book touched a vibrant chord in the heart of Burns. One may well believe, also, that by emphasizing true worth above money or place the novelist found a sympathetic listener in the poet who wrote, "A Man's a Man for a' that."

Rogers, despite his liking for Richardson, was a great admirer of Fielding. His comment on the device of the screen which, in his opinion, Sheridan discovered in Molly Seagrim's bedroom, has already been noted. He was interested in the fact that Horne Tooke read *Tom Jones* "again" while in the Tower (1794);⁵⁹ and, as Miss Godden writes, he "was heard to speak with great admiration" of that chapter (III, xiii) in *Joseph Andrews* "entitled 'A curious Dialogue which passed between Mr Abraham Adams and Mr Peter Pounce.'"⁶⁰ On a famous evening at the home of Rogers the entire "company" agreed that "*Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, and *Gil Blas*, were unrivalled in that species of composition."⁶¹

None of the well-known poets, however, excelled in his devotion to Fielding the obscure and ill-starred Thomas Dermody, who left home as a boy of ten carrying in his pocket "the second volume" of *Tom Jones*, a book which, according to his own testimony, "determined him on this adventure."⁶²

⁵⁹ Rogers, Samuel, *Recollections*, London, 1859, p. 139.

⁶⁰ From a "MS. note by Dyce, in a copy of *Joseph Andrews*, now in the South Kensington Museum."—Miss Godden's *Fielding*, p. 135 note.

⁶¹ *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, New York, 1856, p. 249 note.

⁶² Raymond, J. G., *The Life of Thomas Dermody*, London, 1806, I, 11.

Dermody was never tired of referring to Fielding and of praising him. In one place he calls him "that truly epic historian"; and in another, he says, "Were I sure of sitting by the little hillock which covers the dust of Henry Fielding, who lies in the Factory's burying-ground at Lisbon, I would not grudge the fatigue or expence of journeying thither."⁶³ He can find no sweeter praise for Holcroft's *Alwyn* than that it ranks "next to Fielding's work" in possessing the "most affecting and sportive scenes that ever adorned" a novel.⁶⁴ In his ode "To Comic Romance" his enthusiasm bursts forth in the following indifferent but laudatory verses:

Next the gymnastic Parson [Parson Adams] caught the smile,
In cassock'd wisdom, but resistless mirth;
Created to inform, and glad the earth,
And half allay the pastor's gloomy toil.

But soon the sun of Laughter [*Tom Jones*] rose;
Burst through a cloudy host of foes,
And rainbow wreaths of varying hues combin'd;
With sweet instruction sooth'd the aching mind;
Brisk sprightly warmth, a nymph divine,
Flam'd in the radiance of each artless line.
Amelia's harrowing tale lay yet untold,
Ripe in design, and in pure judgment bold:
Domestic love there breathes his tender soul,
And anxious nature trembles o'er the whole.⁶⁵

Fielding's admirers at the end of the century were to be found in many different walks of life; statesmen, political economists, and architects, as well as poets and novelists, joined in his praise. Among this varied company may be mentioned the celebrated orator and statesman, Charles James Fox, who, on a trip to Paris in 1802, according to the Rev. Mr.

⁶³ Raymond, J. G., *The Life of Thomas Dermody*, II, 239 (Praeludium to "The Battle of the Bards"); II, 268.

⁶⁴ Hazlitt's *Life of Holcroft*, Waller and Glover ed., II, 280 (letter of June 15, 1796).

⁶⁵ Dermody, Thomas, *The Harp of Erin*, London, 1807, II, 96-97.

Trotter, delighted in hearing read aloud Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.⁶⁶ Sir Frederic Morton Eden, the English diplomatist and writer on political economy, commends⁶⁷ in his *State of the Poor . . . in England* (1797) Fielding's own treatise on the poor as showing, to use the words of Scott, "both the knowledge of the magistrate and the energy and expression of the novel writer."⁶⁸ Joseph Farington, the landscape painter, traveling in Wales (in 1800), gives us in his *Diary* a pen picture of an inn-keeper and his wife who put him "in mind of the descriptions of *Fielding*." And the distinguished architect, James Cavanah Murphy, who visited Portugal in 1788, observes regretfully that the grave of "the celebrated Henry Fielding" was "without a monument, or any other obsequious mark of distinction, suitable to his great talents and virtues."⁶⁹ Two years before, the French consul at Lisbon, the Chevalier de Saint-Marc de Meyrionet, had prepared a memorial for Fielding; but for some reason it was refused admission into the cemetery.⁷⁰ It was, however, given a place in the cloisters of the old Franciscan Convent, where Murphy saw it and, transcribing the verses, included them in his *Travels in Portugal*. The epitaph ended rather unfortunately; for the author predicted that in centuries to come this monument would do honor not only to the name of Fielding but to the French nation and, indeed, to the Chevalier himself. Murphy's comment on this piece of vanity took a sarcastic turn; but when his own *Travels* came out in French the translator retorted that there was "plus d'humeur que de

⁶⁶ See Landor's *Charles James Fox*, ed. by S. Wheeler, London, 1907, pp. 106, 107, 110, 116, 142, 143; for the original passages, see Trotter's *Memoirs*, London, 1811.

⁶⁷ So, too, Dugald Stewart, the Scottish philosopher, makes his bow to the "eminent writer" of "The Increase of Robbers."—*The Collected Works*, Edinburgh, IX, 333, 275.

⁶⁸ Referred to by Scott (who follows Watson in his *Life of Fielding*. See Eden's *State of the Poor . . . in England*, London, 1797, I, 320-328.

⁶⁹ Murphy, J. C., *Travels in Portugal*, London, 1795, p. 173.

⁷⁰ *The European Magazine*, XXIII, 408 (June, 1793).

justice" in Murphy's critique and rightly scored the English for their inexcusable neglect of "cet écrivain célèbre."⁷¹

While the Chevalier was endeavoring to place a suitable mark of respect on Fielding's grave in Lisbon, back in Paris the novelist's star was in the ascendant. Mention has already been made of Desforges's dramatic adaptations, *Tom Jones à Londres* (1782), and the sequel, *Tom Jones et Fellamar* (1787). In the preface to the former, the author asserts that Fielding's great work is "entre les mains de tout le monde." In 1800 there appeared also *Le Portrait de Fielding*, a fanciful "Comédie en un Acte, mêlée de Vaudevilles," by "les citoyens SÉGUR, jeune, DESFAUCHERETS et DES-PRÉS," and based on the old anecdote according to which Garrick impersonates Fielding in order that Hogarth may obtain a likeness. A part of the dialogue between Hogarth and Mme. Miller runs as follows:

HOGARTH. Cherchez, au rang des moralistes, les romans écrits par Fielding. . . .

MME. MILLER. Parmi . . . les moralistes? . . .

HOGARTH. Oui, sans doute.

And then to a lively air is set the following characterization:

C'est un Philosophe, un sage,
Qui, seul, a pu concevoir
Ces livres, où chaque page
Nous apprend notre devoir:
Fielding, par ces heureux songes,
Tient son lecteur enchanté:
Ses romans sont des mensonges
Que dicta la vérité.⁷²

Further evidence of the growing interest in Fielding across the water was the appearance in 1796 of a translation of *Tom Jones* (by "le Citoyen Davaux") in which "on a rétabli les morceaux supprimés" by La Place. The interesting preface

⁷¹ *Voyage en Portugal*, Paris, 1797, II, 68 note, 69 note.

⁷² *Le Portrait de Fielding*, Paris, 1800, p. 4.

begins: "ENCORE TOM JONES! Il est si connu en roman, en comédie, en opéra-comique. Je le sais, et je crois cependant donner un ouvrage absolument nouveau. Vous connaissez TOM JONES, ami lecteur; mais vous ne connaissez pas l'aimable philosophe FIELDING, plus gai, plus sensible que RICHARDSON, et peut-être aussi profond."⁷³ As usual, this popularity of Fielding in France helped to swell the novelist's account in England; but of more importance than Davaux's version of *Tom Jones* or the various dramatic fantasies *au sujet de* Fielding was the eulogy pronounced upon him by the great critic La Harpe, who, in his *Cours de Littérature* (begun in 1786) asserts that for him, *Tom Jones* is "*le premier roman du monde*."⁷⁴ The English, he says, though their taste is not so severe as that of the French, have felt the "défauts" of Richardson, and "en générale ils lui préfèrent Fielding"—who like Molière has remained "seul de sa classe"—and then he adds, "J'avoue que pour cette fois je suis de leur avis." Certainly during the lifetime of either Fielding or Richardson it could not be shown that Englishmen preferred Fielding to his rival; nor can the statement go unchallenged as applied to the closing years of the century. La Harpe's words are, however, indicative of the turn criticism was then taking; and the fact need not be emphasized that his encomium on Fielding, the highest so far conferred upon him by any distinguished Frenchman, was heard and reëchoed across the Channel.

Of Fielding in Germany it is unnecessary to speak at length here, for the fame which he won there was not as yet greatly noticed in England. An extended discussion of the novelist's influence is given in Augustus Wood's *Einfluss Fieldings auf die deutsche Literatur*, Yokohama, 1895. It was Richardson, not Fielding, who created an immediate furor in Germany, as the Klopstock letters in his *Correspondence* abundantly

⁷³ *Tom Jones, ou L'Enfant Trouvé*, par le Citoyen Davaux, Paris, 1796, Preface.

⁷⁴ J. F. de La Harpe's *Lycée ou Cours de Littérature*, Dijon, 1821, XVI, 271-274.

show. Later on, according to Coleridge, Richardson's sentimentalism was one of the most corrupting influences on the German drama at the time of Schiller's *Robbers*. But the counter-movement of those who championed Fielding was from an early date distinctly perceptible, and it included first and last among its supporters several notable men. The earliest out-and-out opponent of Richardson was Musäus, whose *Grandison der Zweite* (1760-1762) ridiculed the vogue of that hero⁷⁶—a novel which he made over (and changed the character of) long afterwards (1781-1782) as *Der deutsche Grandison*. Wieland was in the beginning a Richardsonian (he wrote a play entitled *Clementina von Porretta*); but in his *Don Sylvio* he became a Fieldingite; and his *Agathon*—highly esteemed by Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and Schiller—was very obviously influenced by *Tom Jones*. It is significant that Blankenburg, in his *Versuch über den Roman* (1774), relied for his expansive theory of fiction upon the initial chapters which he found in Fielding; and, to pass from theory to practice, that J. J. Bode, refusing to follow La Place and Mme. Riccoboni, presented in his translation of *Tom Jones* (1786-1788)—which, by the way, he made at the request of Lessing—practically the entire book. As a rule the imitations of Fielding's initial chapters, interpolated stories, and incidental disquisitions ran to the limit of absurdity; and though Lichtenberg (that great admirer of the novelist who was called—though inappropriately—"The German Fielding") planned a work which he hoped would become the *Tom Jones* of his native land, no such production by him or by anyone else ever eventuated. Lichtenberg died before the *magnum opus* was finished, and there was no one to take his place. It is on record that Fielding's novels were enjoyed by three great men, Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe, though Lessing was in the main a Richardsonian. Goethe, who several times referred pleasantly to the author of *Tom Jones*, asked Eckermann the celebrated question, "Whence have come our novels and plays,

⁷⁶ See Wood's *Einfluss Fieldings*, pp. 23-24; also C. H. Clarke, *Fielding u. d. deutsche Sturm u. Drang*, Freiburg, 1897.

if not from Goldsmith, Fielding, and Shakespeare?" The most enthusiastic of the group was Schiller, whose exclamation has long since become famous, "Welch ein herrliches Ideal musste nicht in der Seele des Dichters leben, der einen Tom Jones und eine Sophia erschuf!" But we have stepped beyond the limits of our chapter. Whether before the end of the century Fielding's influence in Germany was great or meagre has only a remote bearing on our present investigation; for there is little evidence—as there was in the case of France—that the novelist's fame in *England* was affected by it.

As for America, at the end of the century, it is hardly necessary to observe that nothing that was said there was of much service to Henry Fielding. The time for influence from that quarter had not yet arrived. But, incidentally, the impressions of two young men who were destined later to become celebrities may now be recorded. Young John Quincy Adams, afterwards the sixth president of the United States, wrote in his diary: "At home all the forenoon reading Tom Jones, one of the best novels in the language. The scenes are not only such as may have taken place, but they are similar to such as almost every person may have witnessed. The book cannot lead a person to form too favorable an opinion of human nature; but neither will it give a false one."⁷⁶ And here is a passage from a private letter written by young James Kent, afterwards chancellor of the State of New York and author of the celebrated and extraordinarily popular *Commentaries on American Law*. "No writer that ever lived," he declares (September, 1796), "was superior to Fielding." He "was a man of wonderful talents and inimitable humour. I now own all his works."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Life in a New England Town: 1787, 1788. Diary of John Quincy Adams*, Boston, 1903, p. 16 (August 17, 1787). His excellent mother was "passionately fond of all" the works of Richardson, who, she declared, had "done more towards embellishing the present age . . . than any other modern I can name."—*Letters of Mrs. Adams*, fourth ed., Boston, 1848, p. 261.

⁷⁷ *Memoirs . . . of James Kent*, by William Kent, Boston, 1898, p. 240.

Though this assertion by the enthusiastic young American would have been considered extravagant in England, there can be no doubt that during the final years of the century Fielding's importance in the world of letters was becoming more and more adequately appreciated. One of the best ways in which to realize this fact is to consider the opinions that had been expressed at different times by various members of Dr. Johnson's "Club." To this group belonged Boswell, Murphy, Colman the Elder, Garrick, Burney, Reynolds, Joseph Warton, C. J. Fox, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Gibbon, and Sir John Hawkins—all of whom have been discussed except Sheridan, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Sir John Hawkins. Sheridan, who despite his borrowings from Fielding professed not to care for realism (praising Sidney's *Arcadia* instead), considered Fielding and Smollett the best of the English novelists.⁷⁸ Sir Joshua Reynolds, also, severely as he criticized the famous scene of Partridge at the play, declared *Tom Jones* to be "otherwise a work of the highest merit."⁷⁹ If we make allowance for Goldsmith's stricture on *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* as improper reading for girls and boys, nothing that sounds like Dr. Johnson's denunciation of Fielding has come down to us from any of the persons mentioned except from Sir John Hawkins, while the admiration of Gibbon was placed where all the world might read. One of the stoutest defenders of Fielding was Boswell himself, whose comment upon Johnson's opposition may now be given in more detail: "It always appeared to me, that he estimated the compositions of Richardson too highly, and that he had an unreasonable prejudice against Fielding. In comparing these two writers, he used this expression, 'that there was as great a difference between them, as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.' This was a short and figurative state of his distinction between

⁷⁸ Rae, W. Fraser, *Sheridan, a Biography*, New York, 1896, I, 234-235 (letter to Grenville, October 30, 1772).

⁷⁹ Reynolds's *Discourses*, edited by Roger Fry, London, 1905, p. 362.

drawing characters of nature and characters only of manners. But I cannot help being of opinion, that the neat watches of Fielding are as well constructed as the large clocks of Richardson, and that his dial-plates are brighter. Fielding's characters, though they do not expand themselves so widely in dissertation, are as just pictures of human nature, and I will venture to say, have more striking features, and nicer touches of the pencil; and though Johnson used to quote with approbation a saying of Richardson's, 'that the virtues of Fielding's heroes were the vices of a truly good man,' I will venture to add, that the moral tendency of Fielding's writings, though it does not encourage a strained and rarely possible virtue, is ever favourable to honour and honesty, and cherishes the benevolent and generous affections. He who is as good as Fielding would make him, is an amiable member of society."⁸⁰ And again he said, "I cannot refrain from repeating here my wonder at Johnson's excessive and unaccountable depreciation of one of the best writers that England has produced, *Tom Jones* has stood the test of public opinion with such success, as to have established its great merit, both for the story, the sentiments, and the manners, and also the varieties of diction."⁸¹

Several years before Boswell's *Life* appeared, the notorious prig and formalist Sir John Hawkins had written of Fielding in a manner which outdid even that of Johnson himself. Thus runs his tirade: "At the head of these [novelists] we must, for many reasons, place Henry Fielding, one of the most motley of literary characters. This man was, in his early life, a writer of comedies and farces, very few of which are now remembered; after that, a practising barrister with scarce any business; then an anti-ministerial writer, and quickly after, a creature of the duke of Newcastle, who gave him a nominal qualification of 100l. a year, and set him up as a trading-justice, in which disreputable station he died. He was the author of a romance, intitled 'The history of Joseph Andrews,'

⁸⁰ Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, edited by G. B. Hill, Oxford, 1887, II, 49.

⁸¹ See April 6, 1772.

and of another, 'The Foundling, or the history of Tom Jones,' a book seemingly intended to sap the foundation of that morality which it is the duty of parents and all public instructors to inculcate in the minds of young people, by teaching that virtue upon principle is imposture, that generous qualities alone constitute true worth, and that a young man may love and be loved, and at the same time associate with the loosest women. His morality, in respect that it resolves virtue into good affections, in contradiction to moral obligation and a sense of duty, is that of lord Shaftesbury vulgarised, and is a system of excellent use in palliating the vices most injurious to society. He was the inventor of that cant-phrase, goodness of heart, which is every day used as a substitute for probity, and means little more than the virtue of a horse or a dog; in short, he has done more towards corrupting the rising generation than any writer we know of. He afterwards wrote a book of the same kind, but of a less mischievous tendency, his 'Amelia.'"⁸² This abuse might have been dipped from the running filth of the previous generation. What Hawkins's animus may have been we do not know; but regarding Fielding as he did he must have been exasperated by such complimentary references to him as had appeared in Beattie's *Essays* (1776) and *Dissertations* (1783), in Monboddo's *Origin and Progress of Language* (1776), in Harris's *Philological Inquiries* (1781), in the second volume of Warton's *Essay on Pope* (1782).⁸³ It should be observed, of course, that his worship's onslaught was not directed at Fielding alone but rather against the entire fraternity of fiction-writers, at "the head of whom," for "many reasons," he placed the author of *Tom Jones*. After all, censure from Sir John Hawkins, if we may judge by contemporary accounts of that gentleman, should

⁸² *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, edited by Hawkins, London, 1787, I, 214-215.

⁸³ Even by those who had no very high opinion of Fielding, this attack was regarded as absurd and extravagant (Watson, for example, in 1807, retorted to it). Taine, far along in the Victorian Age, eagerly seized upon it as a *bonne bouchée*.

really be construed as very high praise. Apropos of the change which had come about in the "Club" since the early days, John Forster asserts that "the spectacle of Charles Fox in the chair, quoting *Homer* and *Fielding* to the astonishment of Joseph Warton" was one which Johnson "could not get reconciled to."⁸⁴ In 1787 Hawkins's jeremiad seemed, no doubt, to most of his fellow club-members almost an anachronism.

It is not improbable that in the glowing tributes uttered by the great and influential critics of the following generation—Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt—we catch something of the delight in Fielding which characterized the period of their boyhood. A detailed treatment of these writers belongs to a later chapter; but a word may be said here of their early enthusiasms. Coleridge, who was to be one of the greatest admirers Fielding ever had, at first, to the amazement of the youthful Hazlitt, declared (in 1798) that he "liked Richardson, but not Fielding."⁸⁵ Yet some years before, when as a lad of twenty he wrote the verses entitled "With Fielding's 'Amelia,'" he must have felt differently. After scoring the insipidity of the "soft tale" that claims "the useless sigh," Coleridge says:

With other aim has Fielding here display'd
Each social duty and each social care;
With just yet vivid colouring portray'd
What every wife should be, what many are.

A mother, in his opinion, may well indulge the "hope" that

. . . her loved progeny
In all but sorrows shall Amelias be!⁸⁶

Charles Lamb, whose conversion by Hazlitt remains to be discussed, was in his youth an admirer of all the great eighteenth-

⁸⁴ Forster's *Goldsmith*, second ed., London, 1854, II, 168-169; and *Letters of James Boswell*, edited by Tinker, Oxford, 1924, II, 292. The meeting referred to was in 1791, some years after Johnson's death.

⁸⁵ The Waller and Glover edition of Hazlitt's *Works*, XII, 274.

⁸⁶ Coleridge's *Poetical Works*, London, 1907, pp. 20, 565.

century novelists. In some verses "To T. Stothard," the famous illustrator, he recalls the works he loved as a boy:

. . . In my young days
How often have I with a child's fond gaze
Pored on the pictured wonders thou hadst done:
Clarissa mournful, and prim Grandison!
All Fielding's, Smollett's heroes, rose to view;
I saw, and I believed the phantoms true.⁸⁷

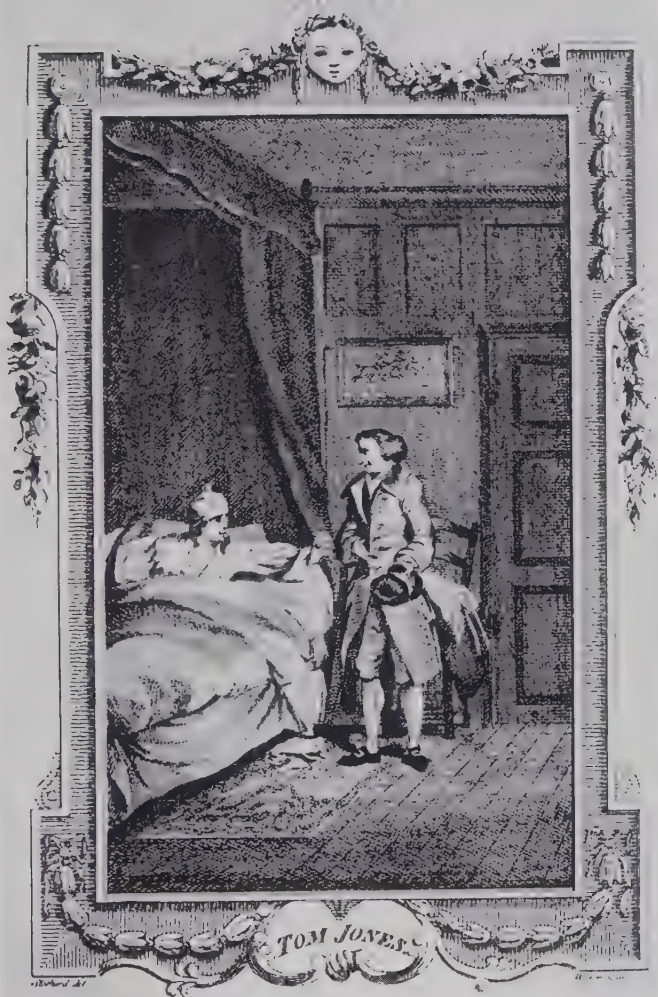
Even heartier than Coleridge or Lamb was young Hazlitt. Looking back on this golden age, he tells of the joy which he experienced on reading these books for the first time. He was "intimately acquainted" with Richardson's "heroes and heroines"; he "was deep in Peregrine Pickle"; and as for Fielding, he "knew Tom Jones by heart." It was in one of the numerous "Cooke" pocket editions, he tells us, that he got his first delicious taste of Fielding's novels. "I do not think any one," he writes, "can feel much happier—a greater degree of heart's ease—than I used to feel in reading 'Tristram Shandy,' and 'Peregrine Pickle,' and 'Tom Jones.'"⁸⁸

For two notable contemporary estimates of the comparative reputations of Fielding and Richardson (the real struggle for supremacy was between them) during the closing years of the century, we may refer to an account⁸⁹ by T. J. Mathias in *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794-) which, according to De Quincey, was the "most popular book of its day"; and to a "History of Literature and Science for the year 1799" (in *The Historical . . . Magazine*) by Robert Bisset, a biographer of Burke. "Every person," says Mathias, "should be well acquainted with the whole of Cervantes, of Le Sage's unequalled and unrivalled Gil Blas, and of Tom Jones, (that great comick Epick poem) by Fielding. These perhaps are all,

⁸⁷ *The Works of . . . Lamb*, edited by Lucas, London, 1903, V, 75.

⁸⁸ "On Reading Old Books," Waller and Glover, VII, 222, 223; also IX, 64; VII, 302.

⁸⁹ Mathias, T. J., *The Pursuits of Literature*, seventh ed., 1798, pp. 59 note, 60 note.



PARTRIDGE SHOWS THE MUFF TO JONES
(*Tom Jones*, Book X, Chapter VI)

which it is *necessary* to read. They afford illustration to every event of life." Smollett, in his opinion, has "much penetration, but is frequently too vulgar to please"; and though he regards *Clarissa* as "the work of a man of virtue and genius, which is too celebrated for any additional praise," his enthusiasm is obviously kept for *Tom Jones*.

The following account by Bisset, though less known than the one by Mathias, was especially commended by *The Anti-Jacobin* as sound and able criticism: "The best fictitious work that Britain has produced for the last fifty years," writes Bisset, "is, beyond all question, *Tom Jones*"—a true "copy of real life." He speaks of the "extraordinary success of Fielding's performances," and the "deservedly great, though deservedly inferior success of Smollett's." Miss Burney, in his opinion, is the only one of the "imitators of real life" who "approached Fielding." Richardson, "instead of portraits and historical paintings," drew "fancy pictures"; and although "few or none" have equaled him "in that kind of writing, yet it was a much easier imitation." Squire Western, Partridge, and *Tom Jones*, he declares, are the "result of accurate observation of actual existence"; while Sir Charles Grandison is "a mere personification of all bodily and mental perfections." In fact, Richardson's chief characters might have been formed from the perusal of "any tolerable book of practical morality," without acquaintance with actual life. The "lower kind of novel writers," he justly observes, "imitate Richardson much more than Fielding."⁹⁰ In his own attempt at fiction-writing called *Modern Literature*, in which he inserted an account of his predecessors, Bisset declared that Le Sage and Fielding had "carried the exhibition of human nature and passions, the manners and characters of the times, to a degree of

⁹⁰ *The Historical, Biographical, Literary, Scientific Magazine*, 1799, I, 55-56. Bisset was one of the first to observe that "neither Fielding nor Smollett . . . allow very great height to their heroes. Roderick Random and Joseph Andrews did not exceed 5 feet 10. Even *Tom Jones* was overtopped by the six-foot man.—pp. 84-85.

perfection that has not been equalled, and scarcely could be surpassed."⁹¹

From neither Mathias nor Bisset, however, do we get an idea of the actual state of affairs; for in certain quarters antagonism toward Fielding was only equaled by admiration for Richardson. This was particularly true of the Evangelical clergy, the different sects of which were at this time growing steadily in numbers and influence. That the Evangelicals were, in general, opposed to all fiction is a well-known fact;⁹² but it has not perhaps been so generally observed that, except with the more rabid, Richardson escaped the ban. A generation later, Macaulay, defending in his famous "Copyright Speech" (1841) the purity of Richardson's works, drew attention to the fact that William Wilberforce, who condemns even the most celebrated novels, "distinctly excepts" Richardson from this "censure." In his *Practical View of Christianity* (1797), which passed through fifty editions in as many years, Wilberforce, while repudiating both Sterne and Rousseau, does not specifically mention Fielding; but his pointed attack on the "vicious" doctrine of "goodness of heart" was doubtless as well understood by his readers as if he had called the promulgator of this doctrine by name.⁹³

Blair, the Presbyterian preacher, in 1783, had proclaimed Richardson the "most moral of our novel-writers"; and, as will be seen, this idea continued to flourish until far along into the nineteenth century. Anyone who cares to turn over the dusty pages of *The Evangelical Family Library* will be surprised to find how vigorous and long-lived was the idea of a "moral" Richardson. It is not strange, of course, that *Grandison* (the real progenitor, doubtless, of the smug youths of the old-time Sunday School Library) was held to be improving reading for the family circle; but *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, oddly

⁹¹ Bisset, R., *Modern Literature*, London, 1804, II, 216.

⁹² Note the attitude of *The Christian Observer*.

⁹³ Wilberforce, William, *A Practical View*, first American edition, Philadelphia, 1798, p. 271. The *Practical View* was afterwards included in *The Evangelical Family Library*.

enough, were also regarded, to use the phrase of a recent writer, as "Sunday and edifying." According to Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Grandison* was the only novel which used to have, in New England, a place beside the Bible on the "toilet-table of godly young women."⁹⁴ This attitude toward Richardson's works of a rapidly increasing religious body was a tremendous force in his favor; on the other hand, the tendency of members of the Non-Conformist persuasion to regard his rival with holy horror added one more misfortune to Fielding's heavy load.

Richardson had a strong hold not only in religious but in educational circles. In France, in 1783, the only novels which Mme. de Genlis exempted from her wholesale condemnation were, as Professor Raleigh observes, "the trio of Richardson."⁹⁵ And Clara Reeve, who looked somewhat askance at Fielding, included *all* of Richardson's works in her list of reading "For Young Ladies." It is true that *Tom Jones* was then commonly read by children, as we gather from the testimony of two young persons of that period—Sir William Watson's niece, and the Eton boy, George Canning (the future statesman); but in both instances Fielding was considered *défendu* for youths and misses, while the moral Richardson was felt to be entirely edifying. Sir William Watson's niece, after having been brought up on Mrs. Barbauld's *Prose Hymns* for children, was suddenly inducted (1787-1788) into her uncle's library, where the "shelves" were "desecrated" by the works of Fielding and Smollett. The pernicious volumes of these authors, she tells us, were not only "open to all," but they were even "put into the hands of all." Many years afterwards she looked back "with horror" upon "this pestilential literature," and upon "its deleterious effect both on myself and on those under whose care I was placed." Much more to her liking were "the distresses arising from those entanglements of sentiment or etiquette" which Harriet Byron "so de-

⁹⁴ *A Library of Famous Fiction*, New York, 1873, Introduction.

⁹⁵ *The English Novel*, London, 1894, p. 249.

lighted in."⁹⁶ The youthful Canning, in an essay in the *Eton Microcosm* (May 14, 1787), was also of the opinion that Richardson was preferable *virginibus puerisque*. There cannot be, he says, "a more partial admirer" of *Tom Jones* than himself; but is it not, he piously asks, "however excellent a work" it may be, put "too early into our hands?" He admits that Tom "is a character drawn faithfully from nature," and "most exquisitely finished"; yet "Is it not also a character, in whose shades the lines of right and wrong, of propriety and misconduct, are so intimately blended, and softened into each other, as to render it too difficult for the indiscriminating eye of childhood to distinguish between rectitude and error?"⁹⁷

In receiving the moral approval of the great Wilberforce, Richardson had again scored heavily over his competitor. And though, as has been noted in this chapter, the fame of Fielding was broadening and deepening at home and across the Channel, we are less startled—when we take into account Richardson's reputation as a moralist—at the discrepancy between the story told by the editions and the story told by *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1797. Here is a list of editions—as given by Professor Cross—between the years 1775-1800.⁹⁸

Of *Amelia* there were the following:

London, 1780; Leipzig, 1781; Leipzig, 1781-82; Milan, 1782; Rheims, 1784; London, 1785; Venezia, 1786; London, 1790; [Paris] 1790; Madrid, 1795-96; Leipzig, 1797; London, Cooke [1798]; London, 1799; London, 1800.

Of *Joseph Andrews*:

Berlin, 1776; Abridged, Newbery [1778?]; London, 1778; Paris, 1779; London, 1780; 10th ed. London, 1781; London, 1781; Dresden, 1783; London, 1783; Reims, 1784; Berlin, 1784; Frankfurth und Leipzig, 1784; London [1785?]; London, 1785; Berlin, 1786; Lipskar, 1787; London, 1788; London, 1790; Philadelphia, 1791; Göttingen, 1792; Edinburgh, 1792; Leith, 1792; London [1793]; Philadelphia, 1794; London [1794].

⁹⁶ *Life of Mary Ann Schimmelpenninck*, London, 1858, I, 124, 118.

⁹⁷ Reprint of *The Microcosm*, 1835, p. 64.

⁹⁸ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 322, 306, 318.

Of *Tom Jones*:

Paris, 1776-77; Paris, 1777; Abridged, London, 1778; Edinburgh, 1779; London, 1780, 4 vols.; London, 1780, 9 vols.; London, 1780, 3 vols.; Paris, 1780, 4 vols.; Paris, 1780, 8 vols.; Edinburgh, 1780; Nürnberg, 1780; London, 1781; Geneva, 1782; London, 1782; London, 1783; Londres, 1783; Polish tr. Warszawie, 1783; Paris, 1784; Reims, 1784; London [1785?]; London, 1786; Leipzig, 1786-88; Polish tr. Wien, 1786-88; London, 1787; Moscow, 1787; Lipsk, 1787; Carlsruhe, 1787-88; Wien, 1788; Paris, 1788; London, 1789; London, 1791; Basel, 1791; Gotha, 1791; Edinburgh, 1791; London, 1791; Abridged, London, 1792; London, Cooke [1792]; London, Murray, 1792; London, Longman, 1792; Warsaw, 1793; London, 1794; Paris, 1794; Philadelphia, 1795; Geneva, 1796; Madrid, 1796; Paris [1796]; London, Cooke [1798].

From this list of editions we get some notion of what was really happening in that last quarter of the century; but the news had not yet reached such standard reference books as *The Encyclopædia Britannica*. In the "Third" and "Greatly Improved" eighteen-volume edition of 1797 under the word RICHARDSON we read that "The most eminent writers of our own country, and even of foreign parts, have paid their tribute to the transcendent talents of Mr. Richardson, whose works have been published in almost every language and country in Europe." Then follow, in all their glory, the splendid passages from Diderot, Rousseau, Dr. Young, Dr. Warton, Dr. Johnson, etc.—the whole occupying a column and a half. Under the word FIELDING,⁹⁹ the manifold activities of that dramatist, journalist, novelist, magistrate, and social reformer were covered in half a column. It is more exact to say that they were almost utterly ignored; for the brief space allotted him was given over to shreds and patches of scandal from Murphy's "Essay":—Fielding's "propensity to gaiety and profusion drove him to write for the stage" at the age of

⁹⁹ *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, third ed., Edinburgh, 1797. In the ninth edition (1879), Fielding had three pages and more to Richardson's one.

twenty, and subsequently he "managed to dissipate in three years" his wife's fortune of £1500 as well as an allowance (which even Murphy declared was mythical) of £200; in "losing his fortune, he acquired the gout," and finally accepted the office of justice, "an employment much more profitable than honourable." So much for the man. And of the author? Simply this sentence: "He wrote a great number of fugitive pamphlets and periodical essays; but is chiefly distinguished" by his *Joseph Andrews* and his *Tom Jones* (*Amelia*, as usual, was not even mentioned)!

CHAPTER XI

Before "Waverley"

1800-1814

AS was seen in the previous chapter, *The Encyclopædia Britannica* notwithstanding, the vogue of Richardson showed signs of waning even before the century was out; in the present chapter, which ends with the appearance of *Waverley* (1814), it will be observed that Fielding gained perceptibly upon his rival. It is a great mistake to imagine with Chateaubriand that Richardson was by this time an almost forgotten writer; the general public, of course, read little save current fiction, just as it does now, but, among those competent to judge, Richardson was regarded with an esteem and reverence well-nigh incomprehensible. The following instance may be considered typical. In an essay *On Novels*, by Thomas Sanderson in 1805, Fielding is mentioned, to be sure, but of Richardson the author says, "None except Shakespeare has displayed such a profound knowledge of human nature . . . he has analysed the human mind; he has delineated with picturesque accuracy the operations of the passions, and dived into the recesses of the heart for the motives of action." A decade or two later, the condition of affairs had changed; in 1829 the clergyman who edited the *Literary Remains* of Sanderson felt obliged to say in a note to the passage above: "Some persons will smile at the praise bestowed upon Richardson."¹ But at the beginning of the century, as the outward refinement of society became more general, the old idea managed to persist that it was Richardson rather than Fielding who was on the side of taste and morality. So far, no Coleridge had questioned Richardson's "sublime system of ethics" or called attention to the "profound distinction" which Fielding drew between conduct and character.

¹ *The Life and Literary Remains of Thomas Sanderson*, by the Rev. J. Lowthian, Carlisle, 1829, p. 106.

Women writers (and at this time fiction was chiefly in the hands of women) were, as a rule, of Richardson's party. Charlotte Smith, to be sure,—who took Fielding as the model for her reform novels, and declared that if even *he* failed "of having effect" in his attack on the "legal pestilence," her "feeble pen" could avail little,—boldly asserted, in her preface to *Marchmont* (1796), that the author whose methods she was studying was the "great master of novel-writing." But Charlotte Smith was clearly in the minority. Of Clara Reeve we have spoken before now; and of Hannah More, who, in *Coelebs* (1808), paid Richardson a very great compliment. Then there was Mrs. Brunton, whose *Self-Control* (1810) was resolutely "attacked" by Viscount Bryce in his youth, though a later book, *Discipline*, was "too much" for him.² *Self-Control* contained a long dialogue on the subject of Tom Jones, in which a prim, Richardsonian character named Laura severely reprehends the frivolous Miss Dawkins for being in love with "that bewitching character," and declares with some feeling that "Tom Jones's warmth of heart and generosity do not appear" to her to be "of that kind" which qualifies a "man for adorning domestic life."³ Lady Charleville (in 1809) entreats the popular Amelia Opie to begin another "good, long, Clarissa-like"⁴ story; and Jane Porter tells us in the preface to *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) that "Agreeably to the constant verdict of good taste, I have ever believed the novels of Richardson to be unequalled."⁵ Stealing a plume from Fielding with which to adorn his rival, Miss Porter says that the works of Richardson, the "contemplation" of which has "tempted" her to imitate, are fully entitled by their "pure morality" and their "unity of design" to be called "epic poems in prose."

² Bryce, J., *University and Historical Addresses*, London, 1913, p. 374.

³ Mrs. Mary Brunton's *Self-Control*, fourth ed., Edinburgh, 1812, I, 134.

⁴ *Memorials . . . of Amelia Opie*, Norwich, 1854, p. 139.

⁵ *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, London, 1803, p. vii.

One is tempted to ask, however, whether to the greater women novelists of the day—Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth—who are linked to Fielding by the satiric touch—whether, indeed, to them also Richardson appeared to be the greater artist and the greater moralist. Miss Edgeworth and, in fact, the entire Edgeworth family seem to have been Richardsonians. When the *Correspondence* was published, Maria's father wrote Mrs. Barbauld that he had just taken a precious volume "out of the hands of one of the eight readers round our table this 4th of September, 1804, 9 p. m. . . . but . . . the book could not be spared to me." Mr. Edgeworth praises Richardson's "enthusiasm for virtue"—his "true politeness of heart and conduct"—and says that "we love the man as much as we admire the author."⁶ Maria herself, as we may judge from a number of allusions in her writings, was an ardent Richardsonian. On the subject of Fielding she has little to say; but a passage in one of her letters deserves mention. When *Waverley* appeared, she complained (October 23, 1814) about Scott's "occasional addresses" to the reader. "They are like Fielding," she says, "but for that reason we cannot bear them, we cannot bear that an author . . . of such original genius, should for a moment stoop to imitation"⁷—a statement in which is implied a higher estimate of Fielding than its author was willing to profess.

Almost equally reticent was Jane Austen. "It would be interesting to know," writes Lady Margaret Sackville in a recent book, "how far she was influenced by Fielding—though there is little trace of any definite influence at all in work so wholly individual. But she must have deeply appreciated the former's magnificent irony—his brilliant character drawing—his unfailing vitality, and doubtless learnt a considerable amount from him."⁸ From a reference in one of her letters

⁶ *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld*, by A. L. Le Breton, London, 1874, pp. 94-95.

⁷ Miss Edgeworth's *Life and Letters*, edited by A. J. C. Hare, Boston and New York, 1895, I, 226.

⁸ *Jane Austen*, by Lady Margaret Sackville, London, *n.d.*, p. x.

(January 9, 1796), it is clear that Jane Austen had read *Tom Jones*. Mr. Tom Lefroy, who had been their guest, has in her opinion "but *one* fault, which time will, I trust, entirely remove—it is that his morning coat is a great deal too light. He is a very great admirer of Tom Jones and therefore wears the same coloured clothes, I imagine, which *he* did when he was wounded."⁹ A careful examination of her novels may some day confirm the suspicion of Mr. Dobson, who says:¹⁰ "Notwithstanding that the fact is ignored by her biographers, we suspect . . . [from the] evidence of the admirable second chapter of *Sense and Sensibility*, where Mr. John Dashwood gradually persuades himself to give nothing whatever to his mother-in-law and sisters—that she was not unacquainted with the works of Fielding." Of her enthusiasm for Richardson we need not speak; yet much as she resembled him in her method of *minutiae*, this method was used in an entirely different service: her aim was not photographic, sentimental, or moralistic, but satiric. Of direct reference to Fielding, however, Miss Austen's writings yield us practically nothing. "Novels . . . are the stupidest things in creation," announces the rattlepated Jack Thorpe, in her *Northanger Abbey*¹¹—"there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since *Tom Jones*, except the *Monk*." Earlier in the book Miss Austen had specifically refuted these statements by citing *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *Belinda*.

Even those successors of Fielding in the satiric vein—Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen—did not, then, all told, put on record much opinion regarding him. While they agreed with women writers in general in considering Richardson's books not merely decorous but profoundly moral, presumably they felt it not quite proper to acknowledge that familiarity with the works of Fielding which is suggested by their own writ-

⁹ Jane Austen's *Letters*, edited by Lord Brabourne, London, 1884, I, 128-129.

¹⁰ Dobson's edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, London and New York, 1895, p. xi.

¹¹ Chapter vii.

ings. Dorothy Wordsworth, we may remember, speaks in her diary (November, 1800) of reading both *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*; but what she thought of these productions she has failed to record.¹²

For half a century after Fielding's death his biography was allowed to remain practically where Murphy left it. Whenever an account of his life was desired, the compiler resorted to the "Essay on Fielding," and, though he gathered with full hands, usually invented little. And it must be admitted that Murphy's account, though reprehensibly careless, officious, and sensational, was at least free from the slanderous remarks of Richardson, Walpole, and Lady Mary, and from any assault upon the morality of the books themselves. But in the early years of the nineteenth century, when controversy over the rival claims of Fielding and Richardson became particularly sharp and bitter, the publication of the letters of Lady Mary (1803) and of Richardson (1804) set going libelous stories which found credulous listeners not only among the friends of *Clarissa* but even among those who should have been Fielding's friends. Again, in 1807, on the occasion of the centenary of Fielding's birth, a Scotchman by the name of William Watson undertook an overhauling of Murphy's "Essay" (Murphy had died in 1805), and produced a biography even more villainous than his predecessor's. Furthermore, determined efforts to disparage Fielding were made by several influential Richardsonians: by Mrs. Barbauld, in her "Life" of Richardson prefixed to the *Correspondence* (1804), and in the prefaces to the *British Novelists* (1810); by her brother, John Aikin, in his account of Fielding in *General Biography* (1803); and by William Mudford, in the introductory essays to his *British Novelists* (1811). There was also a series of diatribes on the part of the Rev. Edward Mangin, an editor of Richardson who did his best early and late to bring opprobrium upon the rival of his favorite. Thus the malice of contemporary de-

¹² *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, edited by W. Knight, London, 1897, I, 57, 58.

famers was again put in circulation, and was manipulated and augmented by those of modern times.

One of the most frequently quoted reference books of the nineteenth century was *General Biography*, of which Mrs. Barbauld's brother, Dr. John Aikin, was editor in chief. His articles on Fielding (Vol. IV, 1803) and Richardson (Vol. VIII, 1813) show clearly where his preferences lie; it is obvious that he regards Fielding as an improper person, whose books are lacking in gentility. Considering the estimation in which Fielding was held by the generality of readers, Aikin did not dare to be entirely outspoken; but he tempered his praise with damaging qualifications, critical as well as biographical. He was, for example, one of the first to promulgate the libel that the author of *Amelia* "had not always been a faithful husband" to his first wife, the beautiful Charlotte Cradock! Even the sensational Murphy, who had a *flair* for scandal, was warm in his praise of Fielding's "constancy." As for the novels, Aikin contents himself with derogatory concessions; mindful of his position as a critic and man of letters he can hardly do otherwise. Elsewhere¹³ he draws a contrast between Addison's Sir Roger and Fielding's Squire Western, in which the latter (regarded merely as disgusting) comes off second best; we are prepared to hear, then, that all Fielding's stories are lacking in the requisite elegance. *Joseph Andrews* is not, indeed, "without strokes of excellent sense and sound morality"; but the "persons and events are almost exclusively of the comic cast" and drawn chiefly from "low life." In the case of *Tom Jones*, the editor of *General Biography* had to make even greater concessions. He can say nothing against the artistic shaping of a novel which "all agree" is a "master-piece," there being perhaps "no fable, ancient or modern" in which "the final catastrophe is kept so long and so well concealed, and is yet so natural and unforced"; but in this book, "as well as in the other writings of the author," the scenes "display too much of the vices and crimes of mankind." Since

¹³ *Essays Literary and Miscellaneous*, London, 1811, p. 346.

it contains, however, a "considerable admixture of nobler matter," the biographer is good enough to allow that Fielding's "intentions were to favour the cause of virtue." *Amelia*, said Aikin, may be "justly placed below Tom Jones in point of variety and invention"; and though it affords "many valuable moral lessons," it is "not free from the faults objected to" in its predecessor. At this point, Mrs. Barbauld's brother, remembering certain passages in the yet unpublished *Correspondence* of Richardson, made the statement that the materials for *Amelia* were "drawn, it is supposed, in part" from the author's "own family history"; while for more information concerning Fielding's career, he directed his readers to *Jonathan Wild*, wherein is displayed "a familiarity with the scenes of low profligacy, which it is extraordinary that a person in decent life should ever acquire."

Obviously John Aikin was no lover of Fielding; but he was perceptibly less "outrageous" about him than his sister, Mrs. Barbauld (that writer of children's books dubbed by Dr. Johnson a "Presbyterian in petticoats"), whose edition of Richardson's *Correspondence* together with a biographical sketch appeared during the year following her brother's article. Mrs. Barbauld did not dare, to be sure, either in her introductory life (1804) or in the preface to the *British Novelists* (1810), openly to deny Fielding's ability in novel-writing; but she passed lightly over Richardson's malignant abuse (which she speaks of as merely not "quite graceful in a rival author") and said specifically that Fielding and Fielding's greatest work were both immoral.¹⁴ It is apparent that she enjoyed Richardson's slander of his distinguished contemporary and that she was very willing to accept it all as true. To her mind Fielding's character was nothing short of depraved; and though she allowed his fame to be considerable and (later) said a number of appreciative things about his books, she skillfully insinuated here (and flatly asserted elsewhere) that his choice of personages and view of mankind were the natural consequence of

¹⁴ *Correspondence of Richardson*, I, lxxix.

what she chose to believe was a vicious life. Richardson's slanders she offered without comment, thinking, one may suppose, that they would be received with approbation.

Partizan as she was, Mrs. Barbauld, in her "Life" of Richardson, had exercised considerable restraint; she was even good enough to place Fielding on the "same shelf" with Richardson, though her own opinion as to their comparative merits is sufficiently clear. But in the prefaces to her *British Novelists*, six years later, she became bolder. She returned to the charge that Fielding "could not describe a consistently virtuous character";¹⁵ and, despite more or less recognition of his ability—allowing him to be "the most distinguished novel-writer in the walk of humour,"¹⁶ praising Parson Adams for being ludicrous without being contemptible, and commending *Tom Jones* for its artful construction and its richness in "humour and character"—she criticized *Amelia* for its fainter humor and "less original" characters; his "women" for their "yielding easiness of disposition"; and finally declared that if "Fielding had written only" *Joseph Andrews*, "there could have been no doubt of his being ranked among the friends of virtue." Mrs. Barbauld's method of vitiating ostensible praise of Fielding with qualifying end-emphasis and skillful innuendo was insidiously effective. Long before Thackeray and even before Scott, she harped upon the idea that by "seeing much of the vicious part of mankind, professionally in his latter years and by choice in his earlier," Fielding's "mind received a taint which spread itself in his works." And this "taint," in her opinion, had become manifest in Fielding's heroines. "A man of licentious manners, and such was Fielding," she declared, "seldom respects the sex." She accuses him of keeping "down the characters of his women": even the charming *Amelia* is to her only an example of that "yielding . . . disposition" which is the quality Fielding "seems to lay the greatest stress upon"; while as regards *Sophia*, "A young

¹⁵ *The British Novelists*, new ed., London, 1820, I, xii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, XVIII, i. For the passages which follow, see pp. xiv, xix, xxv, xi, xvi, xii.

woman just come from reading *Clarissa* must be strangely shocked at seeing the heroine of the tale riding about the country on post-horses after her lover." One can imagine the smile with which Charles Lamb may have read these strictures; a year or so before the *Correspondence* appeared he had written Coleridge, "Damn them!—I mean the cursed Barbauld Crew, those Blights and Blasts of all that is Human in man and child."¹⁷

Richardson's *Correspondence* was reviewed at length in the magazines, notably in *The Anti-Jacobin*, in *The British Critic*, and (by Jeffrey) in the newly established and powerful *Edinburgh. The British Critic*, a religious periodical, went so far as to "defy any reader of taste to open either Pamela, Clarissa, or Sir Charles Grandison without being for some interval agreeably detained and amused";¹⁸ but *The Anti-Jacobin*, though praising the novelist, characterizes his letter to Mrs. Donnellan as a "fine specimen of literary rivalry."¹⁹ Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh*, in spite of much obvious admiration for Richardson, strongly condemned "that most absurd and illiberal prejudice" which he "indulged against all the writings of Fielding."²⁰ In the opinion of another writer for the *Edinburgh*, the Richardsonian Mackintosh, the *Correspondence* was "certainly, in many parts, rather dull, as the reviewers justly say";²¹ yet the "dulness of Richardson" interested him "more than the wit of most reviewers";²² the editor's preface he regarded as "altogether excellent." Mrs. Barbauld, who was a woman of real ability and standing, was

¹⁷ E. V. Lucas's edition of Lamb's *Works*, London, 1905, VI, 253.

¹⁸ *The British Critic*, XXIV, 507 (November, 1804).

¹⁹ *The Anti-Jacobin*, XIX, 174 (October, 1804).

²⁰ *The Edinburgh Review*, V, 38 (October, 1804).

²¹ "Richardson's *Correspondence* has been called disappointing."—*The New Monthly Magazine*, II, 145 (1821).

²² *Memoirs of Sir James Mackintosh*, second ed., Boston, 1853, I, 247. The poet Blake, who had engraved some of Stothard's plates for *Grandison*, declared that Richardson had won "his heart."—Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of William Blake*, New York, 1921, pp. 64, 227.

generally thought to have done her work well; she was praised not only by Mackintosh, but—among others—by the Edgeworths and by C. J. Fox. Still there was one staunch Fieldingite and accomplished man of letters who realized what this clever person was doing and who expressed himself rather forcefully. "Richardson's correspondence," wrote Southey (November 27, 1804), "I should think worse than anything of any celebrity that ever was published, if the life prefixed did not happen to be quite as bad."²³

Truth to tell, the publication of the *Correspondence* very powerfully affected the reputation not only of Fielding but of Richardson as well. Up to the year 1804, Thackeray's "immortal little, kind, honest man"²⁴ had enjoyed an unblemished reputation for generosity and benevolence. No doubt the virtues of Grandison had been as universally transferred to the author of that book as the faults of Tom Jones and Booth had been read into the character of Henry Fielding. But with the publication of the *Correspondence*, Richardson was seen in a new light; his insidious and malignant attempts to undermine his fellow craftsman were now matters of common knowledge. Even the Richardsonians found it difficult to excuse the pettiness and illiberality which the letters revealed; in the long run, the *Correspondence* did irretrievable damage to its writer's fame. At the same time, Richardson's abuse of his rival was given a wide circulation; and, as is the case with all scandal, even though the charges were made by a jealous contemporary they colored and flavored nearly all subsequent accounts of Fielding. But the most damaging statement of all was made by Mrs. Barbauld herself—that Fielding's "mind" had received "a taint which spread itself in his works." Scott took up the cry; and Thackeray reverberated it among the genteel Mid-Victorians.

Mrs. Barbauld's practice of disparaging Fielding's books by first imputing to the author certain moral delinquencies was

²³ *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, edited by Warter, London, 1856, I, 289.

²⁴ *The Virginians*, London, 1858, I, 206 (ch. xxvi).

popular down through the nineteenth century. A good early example of its use is to be found in the *Life of Fielding* (1807)²⁵ by Murphy's successor, the Scotchman, William Watson. At the very outset, this biographer announced his program, which is as follows: he hopes to show "that Fielding, though immersed in pleasure and often enslaved by passion, possessed, after all, a latent worth, which in a great measure redeems his character." This is the premise; the conclusion is not difficult to imagine. Watson declares that he will straighten out some of the chronological tangles in Murphy's "Essay," and will pay especial attention to Fielding's political efforts. It is sufficient to remark that in general he does nothing more than deepen the lines of dissipation in Murphy's presentment, while as regards Fielding's political career he arrives at this amazing conclusion: "We are forced to acknowledge that there is not much to be found [here] to admire, or even to approve!" Dr. Aikin and his sister, Mrs. Barbauld, on reading in Richardson's correspondence that the character of Booth was Fielding himself, had taken the liberty of making in Murphy's account of Fielding a slight emendation which met with entire approval on the part of William Watson. Fielding's first biographer wrote, "Though disposed to gallantry by his strong animal spirits, . . . he was remarkable for tenderness and constancy to his wife, and the strongest affection for his children." Under Aikin's hands (in 1803) this was made to read: ". . . though he had not always been a faithful husband, he had never ceased to be an affectionate one"; and Mrs. Barbauld followed in 1804 with, "Though he might not be a very faithful, he was a very affectionate husband." Thus, to use the words of Professor Cross, who first called attention to this matter, "a constant husband" was, "by a little skilful jugglery," converted "into a libertine."²⁶ Watson's procedure was entirely characteristic; to account for Fielding's overwhelming sorrow at the death of his beautiful Charlotte, he

²⁵ Originally appearing in the *Select Works*, Edinburgh, 1807, it was issued the same year as a separate.

²⁶ *Fielding*, III, 199-200.

suggested that her life was "embittered, if not shortened" by her husband's profligacy, and let his evil imagination run its course in the following sentences: "Every feeling of sympathy and regret, which was displayed by others for the object of his affection, must have served to awaken the recollection of his demerit, and to reproach him with having sacrificed, for the most contemptible gratifications, the welfare and happiness of one who should in a particular manner have been the object of his care and anxiety during life."

Holding this view of Fielding the Man, Watson fell into hopeless contradictions in that portion of his work (consisting mostly of excerpts) which was devoted to criticism. He reprints, it is true, some of the *dicta* of Beattie (the worst of them) and of Cumberland; he exalts Fielding above Mariaux in respect to "the talent of penetrating into the inmost recesses of the heart, and laying open the most secret motives of action." He defends Fielding against Richardson, whose *Correspondence* had recently been published, and says that the letters in question cannot be perused without mingled "pity and contempt." He also defends Fielding against Godwin; and, Scot though he is, gives Smollett second place, yet he insists that his countryman had the better of it in the Newspaper War.²⁷ But he has no quarrel at all with Lady Mary—by including whose remarks he set going more trouble for Henry Fielding; and, to counteract whatever good he might have done by his other extracts, he deliberately and most earnestly recommends to his readers as the best critical account which has yet appeared the attack made upon the novelist by Hugh

²⁷ Though Watson's *Life* was ignored by *The Edinburgh*, it was welcomed by *The Scots Magazine* (LXIX, 917, December, 1807) as the "most . . . satisfactory account which we have met with." Full space is given to his caricature of the novelist as a man "whose unhappiness was the fruit" of his "own errors," and to whom, on account of his "genius, some indulgence may surely be shewn." Owing to the commanding position of Watson's *Life*, not only in the edition of 1807 but also in the subsequent editions of 1812 and 1818, it was very widely read; its injurious effect is most palpable in the use made of it by Walter Scott for his *Lives of the Novelists*.

Murray (the future geographer) in *Morality of Fiction* (1805), from which he gave a long quotation.

In the opinion of Murray, that scavenging young Scotch moralist, the chief faults in Fielding's manner of writing are "pedantry and ostentation of learning, mixed with a good deal of affectation"; nor can he "approve of those long digressions introduced with the view of displaying" the author's "own knowledge, and defending his work from the assaults of criticism." Though he grants Fielding a "very noble and beautiful view of morality" ("benevolence," "generosity," and "disinterestedness"), he finds him at the same time most reprehensible—particularly "in the characters of his heroes, where he has united many agreeable and truly estimable qualities, with a considerable degree of profligacy." The characters of Fielding's heroines, moreover, barring *Amelia*, are neither "very marked" nor "interesting." *Joseph Andrews*, with "the exception of some indecent passages," seems "to be, upon the whole . . . even of a good tendency," though Murray—obtuse to Fielding's humor—"disapproves of the hacknied [*sic*] incident of a discovery of noble birth and consequent removal into a different station." It is in *Tom Jones* that Fielding's "moral defects are most strikingly conspicuous"; for "the species" of "reformation which takes place at the end" cannot "compensate for the course of conduct which has been uniformly persevered in through the rest of the story." Lastly, Fielding "will always be found to excel most in regard to those classes of men with whom he has been most in the habit of conversing"; his "inn-keepers, rogues, and female demireps, are the characters with whom he seems most completely at home."²⁸ Nothing need be said concerning the one who wrote or the one who commended such a criticism.

Four years later, Fielding was again unlucky in falling into the hands of one William Mudford, in whose edition of *The British Novelists* (1811) the old stories gathered further accretions. The so-called "Biographical Sketch" was, in fact, a

²⁸ Hugh Murray's *Morality of Fiction*, Edinburgh, 1805, Part II, 101-105.

villainous *cento* of the disagreeable features of the accounts by Murphy, Watson, Lady Mary, etc., augmented by his own personal disapprobation of an author, than whom "no man of genius perhaps ever sunk deeper into vice and folly." We are told that in his earlier period Fielding "continued to live without labour while he could, not ashamed to receive the casual bounty of his friends"; while, "through the greater part of his life," the "love of pleasure continually led him into embarrassments, and the love of virtue seldom made him scrupulous about the means of extrication." According to Mudford, "no palliative" can be "suggested for a man who makes himself poor by his follies, and still endeavours to gratify them by a repetition of dishonourable artifices or paltry expedients." It would be unnecessary to mention this writer's low opinion of Fielding the Man were it not for the fact that this opinion evidently vitiates to a considerable extent his criticism of Fielding the Author. Turn, for example, to his remarks concerning *Jonathan Wild*, which to his mind is a strange performance. To be sure, he praises its style—the "language," he says, is "constructed with greater skill than in *Tom Jones*," inasmuch as it is "rapid, energetic, and perspicuous"—but why "Fielding was tempted to expand, into a regular narrative, the actions of such a man, cannot," in his opinion, "easily be conjectured";²⁹ he makes, indeed, the amazing statement that it would be "absurd" to connect the notion of "morality" with "such a production as this." In the course of a long-winded criticism of *Tom Jones*, Mudford expatiates on the wonderful construction of the story, which, he admits, is "unequalled, perhaps," by "any composition of similar character and extent, in any language"; yet, either ignoring or perverting Fielding's generous intention, he declares that the career of the hero begins "with a stubborn and pertinacious adherence to a lie" and ends "with an evasion which, if it does not tell an untruth, at least implies it." In brief, Mudford infers that the whole teaching of Fielding's great novel is subversive of those quali-

²⁹ Here, presumably, is where Scott got *his* criticism of the book.

ties upon which "man is chiefly beholden for his social happiness and safety."³⁰

Not content to let Fielding rest in peace, Mudford improved the opportunity afforded by an attack upon Cumberland's *Henry* (in a *Critical Examination* of the writings of that author) to disparage Fielding also. As far as space permitted, the old charges were reiterated: the novelist had spoiled his style with "pedantry," ruined his narrative with "initial chapters," described his women like a "voluptuary," and defaced all his works with "licentiousness."³¹ But compared with the rabid denunciation in *The British Novelists* this snarl in passing was a slight affair.

Thus, in the accounts of Aikin, Mrs. Barbauld, Watson, Mudford, and others, Fielding suffered not only biographically but critically as well.³² During this period there were, however, three compilers of repute whose attitude was more commendable: Nathan Drake, whose first volume of (*Rambler*) *Essays* appeared in 1809; John Nichols (in *Literary Anecdotes*, 1812); and Alexander Chalmers, who in the edition of 1806 appended some notes to Murphy's "Essay," and in 1814 furnished the article on Fielding for *The General Biographical Dictionary*. Drake, like everyone else, accepted as true the stories of Fielding's dissipation and extravagance in youth; but he had not a word to say against him after he was "called to the bar"—from then on "his moral and religious principles," he declares, were "never shaken." As a fiction-writer, he was "truly original, and in the comic epopeia without a rival"; in *Joseph Andrews*, by his "humour," "invention," "facility," and "truth in the delineation of character" he rivals Cervantes and Addison; *Amelia*, if "not equal in the texture and variety of the fable, or in humorous delineation, to Tom Jones, is

³⁰ William Mudford's *British Novelists*, London, 1811, Vol. IV.

³¹ *A Critical Examination of . . . Cumberland*, new ed., London, 1812, II, 501, 508, 516, 510.

³² In *The Portfolio* (Philadelphia), November, 1811, the statement is made that the "licentious and immoral" works of Fielding "libel his reputation in the grave."

nevertheless possessed of great merit, and abounds more in pathos, and moral observation, than any other of the author's works"; while no fable, "ancient or modern, can vie" with that of *Tom Jones* itself, inasmuch as "no event or circumstance, however minute, even though mingled with a plot apparently intricate, seems lost or useless in the completion of the tale."³³

Three years later (1812), John Nichols in *Literary Anecdotes* made a real endeavor to quote the best praise that could be mustered from previous writers. It is interesting to note his list, which includes Gray, Beattie, Monboddo, Lyttelton, Harris, and Blair. He objects to the extravagant abuse on the part of Sir John Hawkins; he passes by the perversities of Johnson and Godwin; and he ignores the malevolence of Richardson, the sneers of Lady Mary, and the ill will of Mrs. Barbauld. Probably with Aikin in mind he asserts that the reading of *Jonathan Wild* is rendered "disgusting" by "the low scenes of profligacy and vice" with which that story "abounds"; yet he willingly quotes Murphy's "approbation" of "this production" as a satire "which at once strips off the spurious ornaments of hypocrisy, and shews the genuine beauty of the moral character."³⁴ Very little criticism do we find here from Nichols himself; and, indeed, when we turn to the veteran biographer's article on Richardson it is easy to see where his sympathies lie: three entire pages are there devoted to the indiscriminating outburst of the Rev. Martin Sherlock, while Arthur Murphy's letter from Apollo to Richardson is exhumed from *The Gray's-Inn Journal* and allowed to shine in Parnassian splendor. Richardsonian as he was, however, Nichols was singularly fair to Fielding.

Much more enthusiastic than Nichols was that enterprising man of letters, Alexander Chalmers, fortunately not a Richardsonian, who published an edition of Fielding in 1806 and later furnished the article on the novelist that appeared in *The*

³³ Drake's *Essays*, London, 1809, I, 79-91.

³⁴ John Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1812, III, 356-385 (Fielding); IV, 578-598 (Richardson).

General Biographical Dictionary, of which he was editor in chief. For his edition of Fielding, Chalmers wrote no account of the author's life (presumably because he had no new materials); instead, he contented himself with reprinting Murphy's "Essay" *plus* certain annotations. It must be admitted that these comments are not all equally fortunate: though, for example, he scores Richardson's illiberality, he actually repeats the printer's statement that Fielding was a second Booth. Nevertheless, he was the first of the editors to defend *Amelia* against traditional disparagement. By the time his account of Fielding in *The General Biographical Dictionary* (1814) appeared, Chalmers had read—if we may judge from the tone of his article—more or less of the abuse which meanwhile had been so popular. Disgusted with defamers of the novelist, he declared emphatically that he was beyond "all comparison the first novel-writer of this country"; that as yet he had had "no equal, no successful rival"; and that "among the many hundreds who have attempted the same species of writing, there is not one who" even "reminds us" of him. "The cause of his superiority," according to Chalmers, "is to be sought in his wit and humour, of which he had a more inexhaustible fund, as well as more knowledge of mankind, than any person of modern times." To his mind, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* are the author's "best performances"; and apropos of the latter work—always a favorite of his—he says, "Many parts of his writings, particularly of his *Amelia*," show that Fielding "could excel, when he chose, in the pathetic." After drawing upon Warton and Beattie for corroborative praise, Chalmers closes by saying that Fielding's "works are as fully established in popularity" as those of "the greatest geniuses of our nation, and the demand for them continues as great."³⁸

There *was* a demand for Fielding's novels. In fact, by 1814 when *Waverley* appeared, the difference between the popularity of Fielding and that of Richardson was keenly felt and even admitted by the Richardsonians themselves. More

³⁸ Vol. XIV.

and more, eulogy of the author of *Clarissa* took the form of a complaint against the growing vogue of his rival. So much a favorite was Fielding in 1807, that Sir Egerton Brydges (who, though not blind to some excellences of the Great Comic-Epic, was sealed of the tribe of Sentimentalism) severely castigated a public taste which could "wade" through the "ordure of a circulating library," and "delight in the filthy amours of Tom Jones."³⁶ It was Brydges, by the way, who endeavored to perpetuate Miss Mulso's abuse of Fielding—which had now become public property—her attack upon *Amelia* appearing to him "so just, and so powerfully stated, that I think it my duty to transcribe it."³⁷ In the following year, the Rev. Edward Mangin—editor of Richardson—who stigmatizes Fielding's works in general as "vulgar trumpery" and *Tom Jones* in particular as the "whole craft and mystery" of "breeding illegitimate children," begins his onslaught on improper fiction by vilifying *Tom Jones*, for the reason that "it is more or less the prevailing fashion to read, and quote, and praise . . . in particular . . . Mr. Fielding's 'History of a Foundling.'" Indeed there "are few persons in these countries, I believe, of any age, sex, or condition, amongst those who can read, to whom the adventures of Tom Jones are not familiar. Something like a sense of shame would accompany the acknowledgment of never having read Tom Jones. . . . It is commonly the first book laid hold of by the youth of both sexes." But the time will come, prognosticates the Rev. Mr. Mangin, when *Tom Jones*, a "fit" manual (with *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild*) for the "rake and the courtesan," will be found "only in the cabinets of the curious and the reprobate."³⁸

As an instance of the avidity with which the "youth" of that period "laid hold" of *Tom Jones*, we may cite the case of the future novelist, William Carleton. Of an odd volume

³⁶ *Censura Literaria*, London, second ed., 1815, VII, 252.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, VII, 386.

³⁸ Mangin, E., *An Essay on Light Reading*, 1808, pp. 34, 48, 31, 46, and *passim*. His edition of Richardson's *Works* appeared in 1811.

which he picked up when a boy he writes, "I have not the slightest intention of describing the wonder and the feeling with which I read it. No pen could do justice to that."³⁹ But the most surprising confirmation of the popularity of the celebrated book comes from Walter Scott's little friend, Marjorie Fleming, who, not over six years old, wrote in her diary, "Tom Jones & Greys Elegey in a country churchyard are both excellent and much spoke of by both sex particularly by the men."⁴⁰

Whether or not "Pet Marjorie" was right concerning the vogue of Fielding, there was no question about the decline of Richardson. "In these times of trifles," writes the Rev. Percival Stockdale, the "productions" of Richardson are neglected and despised; a "corrupt taste" is so "universally diffused" that the reading public "will not deign to read a page" of that "immortal," that "divine" writer, in whose works he discovers the "simple and pathetick oratory of CHRIST."⁴¹ He works himself into a frenzy against Cumberland, who has "vainly endeavoured to obliterate the eternal fame of the authour of CLARISSA." Moreover, *The Quarterly Review* for May, 1810, bemoans the fact that the "elegant and fascinating productions" of Richardson, whose object was "to exalt virtue and degrade vice," have "entirely vanished from the shelves of the circulating library." Even Mackintosh, who was so affected by Richardson that he wrote (March 24, 1812), "I have just finished poor 'Clarissa,' and my body is too weak for writing a criticism—even if my mind had power to do it," was compelled to admit—much against his will, as we see from the following passage—that Fielding was in the lead. "And now I hear a clamour around me," he wrote, September 1, 1811, "*Tom Jones* is the most admirable and popular of all

³⁹ Mrs. Cashel Hoey's *Life of William Carleton*, London, 1896, I, 74.

⁴⁰ Lachlan Macbean's *Pet Marjorie*, fourth ed., London and Stirling, 1914, p. 38. Her first winter in Edinburgh was in 1808-1809.

⁴¹ *The Memoirs of . . . Percival Stockdale*, London, 1809, pp. 95, 96, 93, 98.

English novels, and will Mr. Philosopher pretend that *Tom Jones* is a moral book? With shame and sorrow it must be answered, that it does not deserve the name, and a good man, who finds such a prostitution of genius in a book so likely to captivate the young, will be apt to throw it from him with indignation; but he will still, even in this extreme case, observe, that the same book inspires the greatest abhorrence of the duplicity of Blifil, of the hypocrisy of Thwackum and Square: that Jones himself is interesting by his frankness, spirit, kindness, and fidelity—all virtues of the first class.”⁴² Four years later, he endeavored to explain in one of his articles for *The Edinburgh Review* why the author of *Clarissa* was less popular: “Richardson has perhaps lost, though unjustly, a part of his popularity at home; but he still contributes to support the fame of his country abroad. The small blemishes of his diction are lost in translation. The changes of English manners, and the occasional homeliness of some of his representations, are unfelt by foreigners.” Of the author of *Tom Jones*, with some reluctance, he is bound to say: “Fielding will for ever remain the delight of his country, and will always retain his place in the library of Europe, notwithstanding that unfortunate grossness which is the mark of an uncultivated taste, and which, if not yet entirely excluded from conversation, has been for some time banished from our writings.”⁴³ To go forward a few years in this history, it is a significant fact that the *Blackwood's* reviewer of Scott's *Lives*, on their original appearance in the Ballantyne library of novels, declares that Sir Walter has been too lenient with the author of *Clarissa* and asks (April, 1824), “Who reads Richardson?”

This, of course, should not be interpreted too literally; but we see very clearly what was happening in the decade or so before the appearance of the “Great Unknown.” While Richardson retained to a great extent his supremacy as a moralist, his epistolary form was felt more and more to be cumbrous

⁴² *Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh*, from the second London ed., Boston, 1853, II, 238, 131, 132.

⁴³ *The Edinburgh Review*, XXV, 485 (October, 1815).

and antiquated; on the other hand, Fielding, though censured continually for licentiousness in some of his scenes, was gaining a solid reputation as a literary artist. Even the religious *British Critic* in its review of Mrs. Barbauld had declared that Richardson spoke "with an unbecoming contempt of Fielding, whose reputation as an author is at least equal to his own." *Tom Jones*, continues the reviewer, "ever has found, and always will [find], as many admirers as Clarissa; though beyond question, as a moral writer, Richardson claims and deserves the pre-eminence."⁴⁴ Defying tradition, *The Anti-Jacobin* (1804) had censured Mrs. Barbauld for "supposing Richardson far superior" in pathos to Fielding; and, instancing passages in *Amelia* and elsewhere, had asserted that Richardson appeals to the pathetic "oftener" but not "more strongly." In the reviewer's opinion, Richardson's genius was "over-rated by himself and his friends," albeit he was the ally of "religion and virtue." But it was the powerful Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review* who had the temerity to question the morality of Richardson's novels. "That his pieces were all intended to be strictly moral," he writes, "is indisputable; but it is not quite so clear, that they will uniformly be found to have this tendency." He discovers in Richardson's virtuous characters a "certain air of irksome regularity, gloominess and pedantry." Grandison, he thinks, is more likely to excite derision than admiration; and even in *Clarissa* herself there is something far from "winning and attractive."⁴⁵ To be sure, Jeffrey was never a Fieldingite. He was perfectly willing to accept Lady Mary's account as published in the edition of her *Works*, which he had reviewed in the *Edinburgh*⁴⁶ for July, 1803. Her ladyship's talk about the "sorry scoundrels," Jones and Booth; her identification of Booth as Fielding; and her disparagement of *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* as "mischievous," were presented at length, and the "extract" was commended as "very judicious." In the course of his various articles there are

⁴⁴ *The British Critic*, XXIV, 513 (November, 1804).

⁴⁵ *The Edinburgh Review*, V, 44 (October, 1804).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 519.

other references to Fielding, whose standing he recognizes; though he is scarcely hearty in his praise.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, his review of Richardson, despite much commendation, is a forward-looking document; it represents the breaking up of the old Johnsonian adulation.

Jeffrey's engaging colleague on the *Edinburgh*, the Rev. Sydney Smith, already celebrated for his charm as a lecturer, recognized in Fielding a kindred spirit. In his review of Hannah More's *Coelebs*, which he finds dry and didactic, he commends *Grandison* as a book which "teaches religion and morality" to "many who would not seek it" in the pages of Sherlock and Tillotson; but for all that, he is not afraid to characterize the story of Richardson's good man as "less agreeable than *Tom Jones*."⁴⁸ In one of his extraordinarily popular addresses before the Royal Institution (1804-1806), he made an adroit use of Fielding's remark that "Aristotle is not such a fool as many people believe, who never read a syllable of his works."⁴⁹

Not all preachers of the established church were so open in their admiration of the novelist as Sydney Smith; but not infrequently under the mask of grumbling do we find a tacit recognition of Fielding's place as a writer. Two instances in point are those of the Rev. W. L. Bowles—that latter-day Parson Adams, as he was called; and the Rev. Edmund Cartwright, prebendary of Lincoln, who was celebrated as an inventor. Bowles, who was a great admirer of Richardson, took issue with Warton concerning the excellence of Squire Western—"a grosser caricature," he says, "was never drawn." Yet in the same breath he admits that the "humour" of this character is "unrivalled."⁵⁰ Cartwright, in his *Sonnets Addressed*

⁴⁷ The "morality" of *Wilhelm Meister*, he says (in 1825), is "not worse" than that of "many works on which we pride ourselves at home—*Tom Jones*, for example."—*Edinburgh Review*, August, 1825.

⁴⁸ *The Edinburgh Review*, XIV, 146 (April, 1809).

⁴⁹ S. J. Reid's *Sketch . . . of the Rev. Sydney Smith*, second ed., London, 1884, p. 136.

⁵⁰ Bowles's edition of *Pope's Works*, London, 1806, II, 339.

to Lord John Russell, is evidently very well read in an author with whom he pretends to quarrel. His sonnet on "Prudence" is introduced with the following remark: "Fielding, Sterne, Churchill, and other loose moralists" consider Prudence "but as a sneaking virtue at the best"; while the one on "Patience" is accompanied by a refutation of a saying of Fielding's that "Patience is a virtue which is soon fatigued with exercise."⁵¹

Meanwhile, in the reviews, the old strictures and comparisons continued from time to time up to the advent of *Waverley*. In the course of an article on Mme. Cottin's *Amélie Mansfield*, the writer inveighs against that "warmth of colouring" of which "Fielding is notoriously guilty"; yet, at the same time, he implies that Fielding's novels are "frequently" observed "in the parlours of respectable families."⁵² In 1814, *The British Critic* is disappointed in Dunlop's *History of Fiction* because the author has neither "praised" Richardson "for the purity of his language and sentiments," nor "censured" Fielding and Smollett "for the offense they so frequently give in both respects."⁵³ "Let the admirable construction of fable in *Tom Jones*," wrote Mrs. Brunton, August 15, 1814, lead "to a moral like Richardson's."⁵⁴ Thus the two great exemplars were used as standards by which to judge contemporary fiction.⁵⁵ But it is to be observed that in respect to artistic shaping Fielding was more often considered the superior. In an account of Cumberland's *John de Lancaster*, the *Quarterly* reviewer (said to be Walter Scott) writes as follows: "We cannot place Arundel and Henry on the same shelf" with "Fielding or Smollett, and we are the less inclined to do so as the latter novel, being a close imitation of *Tom Jones*, serves particularly to shew the wide difference between the authors." Speaking of Cumberland's borrowings, the writer calls attention to Ephraim Daw, in *Henry*, as "a methodistical

⁵¹ *Letters and Sonnets*, London, 1807, pp. 50, 125.

⁵² *The Quarterly Review*, I, 304, 305 (May, 1809).

⁵³ *The British Critic*, N. S., II, 180.

⁵⁴ Mrs. Brunton's *Emmeline*, Edinburgh, 1819, p. lxxiii.

⁵⁵ See Mrs. Jane West's reference in *Refusal*, London, 1810, I, 47.

parson Adams, having the same simplicity of character, the same goodness of heart, and the same disposition to use the carnal arm in a good cause"; Robert de Lancaster, he says, is derived in part from Squire Allworthy, "who may not be utterly unknown to some of our readers."⁵⁶ And in the *Quarterly* article on Miss Edgeworth's *Patronage* (January, 1814) the statement is made that any "comparison with so happy an effort" as *Tom Jones* of "so great a master" as Fielding "would necessarily be unfair."⁵⁷ What the reviewer "most" admires in that celebrated novel is the "wonderful variety of incidents arising without improbability, and introduced without confusion, and tending through a story constantly rising in interest, to an unforeseen catastrophe."

The assertion is frequently made that Fielding was forgotten before *Waverley*; but—as has already been seen—such a notion is utterly erroneous. Had the characters of the great books been lost in oblivion in 1813, Colman the Younger, who was a good judge of his audience, would never have written that long poem on Fielding's parsons which runs (in part) as follows:

Tell me did FIELDING dip his powerful pen
In gall, to stigmatize all Clergymen?
Although he shews their need,—nay, shews, to boot,
This Priest a Drunkard, that a selfish Brute,
Who, in his senses, ever understood
He aim'd at writing down the Brotherhood?
Ye Novel-Readers!—such as relish most
Plain Nature's feast, unpepper'd with a Ghost,
Tell me, how many Parsons there may be
In JOSEPH ANDREWS'S adventures?—Three.
The *first*,—the choicest Punch-Maker, by far,
Of Customers behind the *Dragon's* bar;
Who, ere the Bowl's replenish'd, reels up stairs,
And, o'er a wretch deem'd dying, hiccup's prayers;

⁵⁶ *The Quarterly Review*, I, 337, 338, 339 (May, 1809).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 307.

While no one ventures, though impatience burns,
 To squeeze the Oranges till he returns.
 The *Second*,—witless in the bashful art
 That hides a sulky savageness of heart;
 Who, though a multitude of sins had He,
 Would scorn to cover them with Charity;—
 A bare decorum, and his Cure, to keep,
 Sure as the Sabbath comes, attends his Sheep . . .
 Drives to the Fair fat Porkers that he feeds,—
 A much more genuine Hog than all he breeds.
 The *Third*,—oh FIELDING! *there*, thy Master-Hand
 Will Truth deny? can Gravity withstand?
There Genius, Observation by his side,
 Has taught us how to *sport*, yet not *deride*;
There the keen Artist, the poor Churchman's Friend,
 Bids Laughter, Moral, and Religion blend.
 Seek contrarieties in Man combine'd:
 Book-knowledge, with no knowledge of Mankind;
 Good parts, good nature, open to the shaft
 Of worldly Ill, for want of worldly Craft;
 Virtue so pure it ne'er suspects Deceit,
 Though, every hour, it suffers by a Cheat;
 Simplicity of Soul that claims respect,
 But leaves its Owner threadbare, in neglect . . .
 Seek, in one Person mix'd, the traits that move,
 At once our pity, mirth, esteem, and love . . .
 So *Adams* sprang, to offer Taste a treat,
 From Fielding's brain, a *Character* complete.
 And though the Curate meets with many a rub;
 Is souse'd, alas! into a water-tub . . .
 Does, then, the good Man's Ducking, Candour, say!
 His, or his Order's, virtues wash away? . . .
 If so, then Fielding, doubtless, would infer
 Scandal by *Barnabas*, and *Trulliber*;
 Infer the reverend Clergy's weightiest work
 Consists—in making Punch, and fattening Pork."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Colman the Younger, "Vagaries Vindicated," second ed., in *Poetical Vagaries*, London, 1814, pp. 203-204 (Advertisement to first ed., dated June 17, 1813).

Clearly enough the great novelist was popular at this time at home; but the reputation which his rival enjoyed of having achieved the greater triumph abroad was to all good Fieldingites somewhat disconcerting. The explanation commonly given was that Richardson was less provincial, less ultra-English than Fielding; while Richardsonians went a step farther and, fortified by Johnson's famous *dictum*, asserted that his wide appeal was due to a greater profundity. Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, for example, while conceding that Fielding had "attained the highest eminence" in novel-writing, insists that foreigners "neither can taste his works, nor will he ever attain to the fame of Richardson beyond the limits of his own country"; that *Clarissa* and *Clementina* will "penetrate" where *Sophia Western* and *Parson Adams* "never can be known or appreciated." And the reason for this (here he quotes Johnson's opinion as given by Mrs. Piozzi) is that Fielding painted "mere manners" while Richardson depicted "general nature," that "Fielding gave us the husk of life . . . while Richardson picked out the kernel."⁵⁹ Mr. H. B. Wheatley, to whose edition of Wraxall we are referring, adds a pertinent footnote to the effect that "The criticism of to-day [1883] as to the rival novelists would be very different"; but Wraxall's views were indisputably common in 1815. That ardent propagandist for *Clarissa*, Mme. de Staël—who became so strenuous in her activities that she disgusted the Fieldingite Byron—was a powerful advocate on both sides of the water for the profundity of Richardson. It is true she had a good word for *Tom Jones*, which, she says, "cannot be considered simply as a novel," though "the abundance of philosophical ideas, the hypocrisy of society, and the contrast of natural qualities are brought into action with an infinity of art"; yet to her mind Richardson was "first in rank."⁶⁰ So common was the notion that Fielding was the most "English"

⁵⁹ *Memoirs of . . . Wraxall*, edited by Wheatley, London, 1884, I, 37, 38.

⁶⁰ *Influence of Literature on Society*, tr. from the second London ed., Boston, etc., 1813, I, 293.

of all English writers that more than one foreigner who desired to learn not only the idiom but the "manners and peculiarities"⁶¹ of England turned to a novel of his as to a handbook. Still, La Harpe's famous praise had not only found its way into Suard's account of Fielding in the *Biographie Universelle*,⁶² but was already making an impression upon periodical reviewers⁶³ in England.

For several years before *Waverley* the three men who were to be the greatest critics of the new century were, by companionable "repercussion," perfecting themselves in the theory and practice of their art. Of the "many lively skirmishes we used to have" at Lamb's "Thursday evening parties" Hazlitt has left a glowing record. "The Scotch novels," he writes, "had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them"; but over "the old everlasting set"—Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Richardson, and "all those things that, having been once, must ever be"—discussion "ran high." It is to be noted that the affections of the "Companions" were catholic enough to permit the enjoyment of all four of the great novelists. With Coleridge, catholicity was a point of doctrine. "I have no repugnances," wrote Lamb, "Shaftesbury is not too genteel for me, nor Jonathan Wild too low." "Most men's minds," complained Hazlitt, "are like musical instruments out of tune"; they "adore Richardson but are disgusted with Fielding." He praises Fawcett, his "first literary acquaintance," for having a "taste accomodated to all." On one celebrated evening, according to Hazlitt, the subject of discussion was "Persons One would Wish to Have Seen." "We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate: only one, however, seconded the proposition. 'Richardson!'—'By all means, but only to look at him through the glass-door of his back-shop . . . [not] to go upstairs with him, lest he

⁶¹ *Autobiography of A. B. Granville*, London, 1874, I, 273.

⁶² Tome XIV, pp. 501 ff., Paris, 1815.

⁶³ *The British Critic* (xxiii, 638) in a review of *General Biography*, objecting to Aikin's statement that Fielding is "little relished by foreigners," cites La Harpe and others.

should offer to read the first manuscript of "Sir Charles Grandison" . . . in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that "Joseph Andrews" was low."⁶⁴

This passage has been used to show that Fielding was not popular in this period—an entirely mistaken idea—but if we may believe Hazlitt, neither Coleridge nor Lamb was at first of his party. Between Hazlitt and Coleridge the controversy presumably turned upon the relative merits of Fielding and Richardson. In 1798—to recall the story—some dozen years before the parties began at Lamb's, the youthful Hazlitt, who had made a special journey on foot to meet Coleridge (whom he admired at a distance), was disappointed to find that the latter should prefer Richardson to Fielding, and was unsuccessful in weaning him from that preference. But before he died Coleridge became a staunch Fieldingite, and even before *Waverley* he had been turning away more and more from the author of *Clarissa*. His first marked revulsion against him seems to have resulted from the perusal of Mrs. Barbauld's *Correspondence*. He writes in his diary in 1805: "I confess that it has cost, and still costs, my philosophy some exertion not to be vexed that I must admire, aye, greatly admire, Richardson. His mind is so very vile a mind, so oozy, hypocritical, praise-mad, canting, envious, concupiscent! But to understand and draw *him* would be to produce a work almost equal to his own; and, in order to do this, '*down, proud Heart, down*' (as we teach little children to say to themselves, bless them!), all hatred down! and, instead thereof, charity, calmness, a heart fixed on the good part, though the understanding is surveying all. Richardson felt truly the defect of Fielding, or what was not his excellence, and made that his defect—a trick of uncharitableness often played, though not exclusively, by contemporaries. Fielding's talent was observation, not meditation. But Richardson was not philosopher enough to know the dif-

⁶⁴ Lucas's *Life of Charles Lamb*, New York and London, 1905, I, 529.

ference—say, rather, to understand and develop it.”⁶⁵ Between Hazlitt and Lamb one of the chief subjects for debate was the comparative excellence of Fielding and Smollett. In fact, Hazlitt’s well-known essay on the English novelists in *The Edinburgh Review*, February, 1815, was the result, he informs us,⁶⁶ of a “sharply-seasoned and well-sustained” discussion with Lamb (“some years” before) kept up till midnight. It was to such a debate as this, that Hazlitt referred when he said: “I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading” Lamb, “after some years’ difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett.”⁶⁷

Even before prose-narrative was rescued by Walter Scott from the scorn of reviewers, the great critics then coming into power—Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt—were giving serious attention to the older writers. One of the most notable outward manifestations of this increasing interest was the publication (by John Dunlop, in 1814) of the first extended *History of Fiction*—a work much more compendious than the previous account by Clara Reeve. In the brief section which is devoted to modern novelists, Dunlop perfunctorily accepts the old eighteenth-century categories—“serious” (for Richardson) and “comic” (for Fielding and Smollett), adding to these the “romantic” (in order to include the tales of terror). “At the head of the first class” he “unquestionably” places the “works of Richardson.” *Tom Jones*, he says, is “the most celebrated” of Fielding’s novels, and “perhaps the most distinguished of all comic romances”; for never “was a work more admirably planned,” and “besides,” “what humour and naïveté, what wonderful force and truth in the delineation of incident!”⁶⁸ Only one fault does he discover in the book—Tom’s illegitimacy. Possibly Walter Scott was thinking of Dunlop when he defended Fielding against this curious ineptitude. In default of a better, *The History of Fiction*—despite

⁶⁵ *Anima Poetae*, London, 1895, pp. 166-167.

⁶⁶ The Waller and Glover edition of Hazlitt, VIII, 499.

⁶⁷ A. Birrell’s *Hazlitt*, New York and London, 1902, p. 122.

⁶⁸ Dunlop, J., *The History of Fiction*, London, 1814, III, pp. 372 ff.

its inadequacy—occupied the field for half a century or more after its publication; but even at the time there was one critic in England who was aware of its shortcomings. Hazlitt, who reviewed the book for the *Edinburgh*, desired to see “the History of Fiction executed on a very different plan,” with a “greater spirit of philosophical inquiry and critical acuteness.”⁶⁹ Presumably it was with Dunlop’s treatise in mind (as well as the famous discussion with Lamb) that Hazlitt wrote the excellent sketch which appeared (in *The Edinburgh Review*) the following February. Thus the ground was being prepared for the great critical era immediately forthcoming.

It is clear that artistically Fielding was winning and Richardson losing; but Richardson still held his own as a profound moralist, and that difference in altitude between the rival novelists which is now generally conceded was as yet rarely perceived.

⁶⁹ *The Edinburgh Review*, XXIV, 58 (November, 1814).

CHAPTER XII

From "Waverley" to the Death of Scott

1814-1832

I

The Great Critics

OF those "who are charmed with the writings of Cervantes, Richardson, Fielding, and Rousseau," ran an article in *The Quarterly Review* for January, 1814, "a very large portion are quite unaware that they are to be numbered among the most successful efforts of human wit, ingenuity, and eloquence."¹ In after years, Jeffrey himself, looking back (1843) on his own early papers in the *Edinburgh*, thus excuses himself for his cavalier treatment of prose fiction: "It may be worth while to inform the present generation that, *in my youth*, writings of this sort were rated very low with us—scarcely allowed indeed to pass as part of a nation's permanent literature—and generally deemed altogether unworthy of any grave critical notice. Nor . . . in spite of Cervantes and Le Sage . . . and even our own Richardson and Fielding at home—would it have been easy to controvert that opinion, in our England, at the time."² But after *Waverley* (1814) the reviewers of novels resorted less and less often to apology; it was Scott who secured for fiction the respect to which it was entitled. Even before the appearance of his popular romances, as we have observed, the three greatest critics of the age were not above turning their minds on occasion to the subject of prose narrative. It follows, therefore, that the years we are now to consider are incomparably richer than any previous ones in *dicta* concerning Fielding's works. Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, Scott, Hunt, and others have left a consider-

¹ *The Quarterly Review*, X, 302.

² Jeffrey's *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, London, 1844, III, 396. The preface is dated November 10, 1843.

able body of opinion on record; and though the criticisms of only two of them (Hazlitt and Scott) extend to the length of an essay on the novelist, the authority of the authors was considerable enough to make a difference with posterity. Indeed, the casual reference to Fielding by a celebrity like Byron became a greater future asset to him than many a well-expressed and ably substantiated paragraph by writers of lesser reputation. As we take account of the influences which from 1814 to 1832—a period notable for its romantic tendencies, its critical ability, and its growing outward refinement—affected the name and fame of Fielding, certain questions naturally present themselves. After the new points of view made popular by the romances of Scott, with what eyes did the general reader look back upon *Tom Jones*? How did its author endure the test of the criticism employed by Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt? Did the exponents of the refinement of manners continue to esteem Richardson above Fielding? Such questions as these will be the main concern of the present chapter.

Sir Walter Scott's triumph with *Waverley* and its successors need not be rehearsed here—the fame of the "Great Unknown" shot up like a century plant. In a letter of December 10, 1814, Mrs. Brunton laments the "unfortunate" circumstance that her novel *Discipline* (1814) made its appearance "after *Waverley*"—the "most splendid exhibition of talent in the novel way, that has appeared since the days of Fielding and Smollett. What a competitor for poor little me!"³ During the next fifteen years the world of fiction-readers was almost entirely under the spell of Sir Walter's picturesque historical narratives. In the minds of such influential writers as Jeffrey, Lockhart, and Wilson, these romances, with their strong infusion of the poetical, belonged to a higher *genre* than the *unromantic* novels of Fielding. But the greater critics,—Coleridge, Lamb, and even Hazlitt,—it is interesting to observe, were never guilty of such an opinion. Their acquaintance with Fielding began early, and in each instance their admira-

³ See Mrs. Brunton's *Emmeline*, Edinburgh, 1819, p. lxxvi.

tion for him increased with the years, expressing itself in enthusiastic phrases which have stirred the blood of posterity. It was before the days of the "Scotch Novels" that their famous discussions of the eighteenth-century writers began, and, as we shall observe, their judgment was never deflected by the vogue of Scott; yet the true comparative altitudes of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett were not quite clearly seen by them, although both Lamb and Coleridge came at length to realize the superiority of Fielding. On account of the importance of these great critics, a somewhat extended consideration of their *dicta* will now be given.

HAZLITT

Of Hazlitt's early enthusiasm for Fielding's novels we have already spoken. "I think of the time 'when I was in my father's house, and my path ran down with butter and honey'"—he writes (in his essay "On Reading Old Books")—"when I was a little, thoughtless child, and had no other wish or care but to con my daily task, and be happy!—Tom Jones, I remember, was the first work that broke the spell." Coming in "numbers once a fortnight," which "regularly contrived to leave off just in the middle of a sentence" and "in the nick of a story," it "was to me a dance through life, a perpetual gala-day." Of the heroine of *Joseph Andrews*, Hazlitt says, "there is a picture of Fanny" which the reader "should not set his heart on, lest he should never meet any thing like it." He was also fond of *Amelia*. "With what eagerness," he exclaims, did I "look forward to the next number, and open the prints! Ah! never again shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures, and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath."⁴

It was in 1815, after his famous debates with Lamb, that Hazlitt's most elaborate and best-known assessment of Fielding appeared. He describes him, at the outset, as a master of the "*double entendre*" of character, who "surprises you no less

⁴ Waller and Glover ed., VII, 222, 223.

by what he leaves in the dark, (hardly known to the persons themselves), than by the unexpected discoveries he makes of the real traits and circumstances in a character with which, till then, you find you were unacquainted." Farther on, he refutes and endeavors to explain Johnson's charge that Richardson is profound and Fielding superficial. "Richardson," says Hazlitt, "presents you with a conventional and factitious nature, instead of what is real. He furnishes his characters on every occasion with the presence of mind of the author. He makes them act, not as they would from the impulse of the moment, but as they might upon reflection, and upon a careful review of every motive and circumstance in their situation." In short, "if the business of life . . . was carried on by the post (like a Spanish game at chess), human nature would be what Richardson represents it." "Dr. Johnson," concludes Hazlitt, "seems to have preferred this truth of reflection to the truth of nature." Hazlitt was not content to repeat the platitude that Fielding shows a "profound knowledge of human nature"; he defined his terms and drew distinctions. The word "manners," he says, implies "the sum-total of one's habits and pursuits": Fielding, in his opinion, is a true novelist of "manners"; Miss Burney, only of "manners of people in company." Moreover, Fielding must not be carelessly bracketed with Le Sage, who does not "trace the peculiar and shifting shades of folly and knavery as they are found in real life"; nor with Smollett, who was not an observer of "the characters of human life," but of "its various eccentricities."⁵ And in general, writes Hazlitt, Fielding "has brought together a greater variety of characters in common life,—marked with more distinct peculiarities, and without an atom of caricature, than any other novel writer whatever. The extreme subtilty of observation on the springs of human conduct in ordinary characters, is only equalled by the ingenuity of contrivance in bringing those springs into play, in such a manner as to lay open their smallest irregularity. The detection is always com-

⁵ It is only your "common-place" critic, he says, who "prefers Smollett to Fielding."—Waller and Glover, I, 138.

plete—and made with the certainty and skill of a philosophical experiment, and the ease and simplicity of a casual observation. The truth of the imitation is indeed so great, that it has been argued that Fielding must have had his materials ready-made to his hands, and was merely a transcriber of local manners and customs. For this conjecture, however, there seems to be no foundation. His representations, it is true, are local and individual; but they are not the less profound and natural. The feeling of the general principles of human nature, operating in particular circumstances, is always intense, and uppermost in his mind."⁶

This celebrated *Edinburgh* article (which with some changes and additions appeared four years later as Lecture VI of the *English Comic Writers*, 1819) attracted little attention at the time, though it was warmly praised (April 24, 1815) by the diarist, Crabb Robinson, as "very intelligent"—the "discrimination between Fielding and Le Sage particularly excellent."⁷ Its "critical acuteness" makes us regret that Hazlitt never produced a longer treatise on Fielding and his contemporaries, though no single dissertation on the author of the three great novels could prove more conclusively an enthusiasm already sufficiently indicated by a series of allusions which cropped out during an entire literary lifetime. The best way in which to realize this fact is to follow the references year by year—not a year is lacking in them—from 1814 to 1830.⁸ Of this body of comment only a word, of course, can

⁶ Ostensibly a review of Fanny Burney's *Wanderer*, *The Edinburgh Review*, XXIV, 327, 331, 332, 330, 326, etc. (February, 1815).—Waller and Glover, X, 27 ff.

⁷ *Diary . . . of Henry Crabb Robinson*, second ed., London, 1869, I, 480.

⁸ Here are some of the references given in the Waller and Glover edition, rearranged chronologically:—1814: June (I, 28); 1815: February (VIII, 107), Sept. 3 (XI, 273 note); 1816: (II, 171 note, 280), March 10 (VIII, 287); 1817: June 30 (III, 233), Oct. 15 (XI, 403); 1818: August (XI, 435-436), December (X, 167-168); 1819: (VIII, 79, 107, 133); 1820: (V, 284), July (VIII, 454), Sept. 20 (VII, 36); 1821: January (VII, 214), June (XI, 501); 1822: (VI, 236), (XII,

be said here; but it is apparent that the works of Fielding had passed into the very texture of Hazlitt's mind. Walking through Upton on his journey to meet Coleridge in 1798, the youthful Hazlitt had dwelt upon the incident of Sophia Western and her muff; the mature Hazlitt in his literary journeys everywhere recalled the scenes and characters of Fielding's novels. He cannot speak, for example, of Chaucer's "Serjeant at Law," who always "semed besier than he was," without stopping to characterize him as the "same identical individual as Lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones."⁹

It is true that Hazlitt appears never to have realized the difference in altitude between Fielding and Richardson, the latter of whom he also praised early and late. He declared in his essay "On Reading Old Books" (February, 1821): "I consider myself a thorough adept in Richardson. I like the longest of his novels best, and think no part of them tedious; nor should I ask to have any thing better to do than to read them from beginning to end . . . till every word and syllable relating to the bright Clarissa, the divine Clementina, the beautiful Pamela . . . were once more 'graven in my heart's table.'"¹⁰ One of his reasons for liking Napoleon (whom Croker, another great lover of Fielding, regarded as a second "Jonathan Wild the Great"¹¹) was, that the First Consul had alluded once upon a time to Richardson's *Lovelace*. Still, though he appears to have been blinded by the splendor of *Lovelace*, he never tried to set Richardson above Fielding; nor did he refer to him so frequently. Even the "bright Clarissa" and her martyrdom could not make him forget the pa-

435); 1823: (II, 391), (X, 206), (XI, 543), (XII, 274); 1824: (VII, 84), (IX, 391), Oct. 6 (IX, 118); 1825: (VII, 322), (XII, 22); 1826: (VI, 426, 448, 452, 457, 458), (VII, 363), January (XII, 32), April (XII, 46); 1827: (XII, 63), March (XII, 155 note), Dec. 15 (XII, 310); 1828: (XI, 374), (XII, 98); 1829: (XII, 374), (X, 328); 1830: (XII, 226).

⁹ Waller and Glover, V, 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VII, 226-227.

¹¹ *The Correspondence . . . of . . . John Wilson Croker*, New York, 1884, I, 313 (date 1826).

tient Amelia and the little supper of "hashed mutton." Nor did he refuse to admit Joseph Andrews's sweetheart to the inner circle: "I admire the Clementinas and Clarissas at a distance,"¹² he once said, but "the Pamelas and Fannys of Richardson and Fielding make my blood tingle."

Unlike Mudford and Mangin and Mrs. Barbauld, Hazlitt never expatiated on Fielding's lack of "morality"; only in the early review in the *Edinburgh* did he make any concession on that score, and when he revised the article for his book on the *Comic Writers* four years later, he changed his phrase entirely. This bit of history, which has not perhaps been generally observed, is as follows. In 1815 he wrote of *Tom Jones*: "The moral of this book has been objected to, and not altogether without reason"; in his lecture "On the English Novelists" (1819), the sentence was made to read—as everyone now knows it—"The moral of this book has been objected to, without much reason."¹³ No farther than this did Hazlitt ever go in his strictures on Fielding's morality; as will presently be seen, he became eventually one of the novelist's staunchest defenders. The only "serious objection," which he recorded in his *Edinburgh* article and which he afterwards reiterated, was in regard to "the want of refinement and elegance in the two principal characters. We never feel this objection," he says, while "we are reading the book; but at other times, we have something like a lurking suspicion that Jones was but an awkward fellow, and Sophia a pretty simpleton." In November, 1827, three years before his death, Hazlitt held, apparently, the same opinion as in 1815. "Many people," he writes (in his essay on the "Insipidity of the Heroes of Romance"), "find fault with Fielding's *Tom Jones* as gross and immoral. For my part, I have doubts of his being so very handsome from the author's always talking about his beauty, and I suspect he was a clown, from being constantly assured he was so very genteel. Otherwise, I think Jones acquits himself very well both in his actions and speeches, as a lover and as a trencher-

¹² Waller and Glover, VI, 236.

¹³ *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, London, 1819, p. 226.

man whenever he is called upon. Some persons, from their antipathy to that headlong impulse, of which Jones was the slave, and to that morality of good-nature which in him is made a foil to principle, have gone so far as to prefer Blifil as the *prettier fellow* of the two. I certainly cannot subscribe to this opinion, which perhaps was never meant to have followers, and has nothing but its singularity to recommend it. Joseph Andrews is a hero of the shoulder-knot: it would be hard to canvass his pretensions too severely, especially considering what a patron he has in Parson Adams. That one character would cut up into a hundred fine gentlemen and novel-heroes! Booth is another of the good-natured tribe, a fine man, a very fine man! But there is a want of spirit to animate the well-meaning mass. He hardly deserved to have the hashed mutton kept waiting for him. The author has redeemed himself in *Amelia*; but a heroine with a *broken nose* and who was a married woman besides, must be rendered truly interesting and amiable to make up for superficial objections. The character of the Noble Peer in this novel is *not* insipid. If Fielding could have made virtue as admirable as he could make vice detestable, he would have been a greater master even than he was. I do not understand what those critics mean who say he got all his characters out of ale-houses. It is true he did some of them."¹⁴ Hazlitt's objection to the "want of taste and elegance" in *Tom and Sophia* is not, as some critics have thought, a stricture upon the author's "lowness"—against *that* charge he defended the novelist as long as he lived—but rather a feeling of regret that these characters of Fielding's do not exhibit a certain magnificence which he so much admired in those of Richardson. Significantly enough, in the *Edinburgh* article, he had spoken of *Lovelace* as Richardson's "masterpiece," excelling even *Clarissa* herself, and had dwelt upon the "regality" of his "mind, his wit, his person, his accomplishments, and his spirits." On this point, needless to say,

¹⁴ Waller and Glover, XII, 63-64; see *The New Monthly Magazine*, XX, 420 (November, 1827).

few modern writers have been able to agree with Hazlitt, who was obviously led astray by a certain *penchant* for elegance.

As regards Fielding's manner of life, however, Hazlitt, who troubled himself little with biographical details, seems to have accepted the notion which had been handed down by Murphy and Lady Mary. And when, in 1818, he was called upon to review the *Letters from Walpole to George Montagu*, he read the story of the blindman and the three Irishmen without question, as everyone else did. Accordingly—for no reviewer could neglect so good a bit of scandal as this—he introduced the passage with these words: "This little peep into Fielding's private hours, lets us at once into his course of studies, and is an admirable illustration of his *Tom Jones*, *Jonathan Wild*, and other novels. We are taken into the artist's workshop, and shown the models from which he works; or rather, we break in upon him at a time when he is copying from the *life*." In the preceding April, the *Quarterly* reviewer had characterized Walpole's "anecdote" of Fielding's "*vie privée*" as "more remarkable than pleasing."¹⁵ Perhaps with this criticism in mind, Hazlitt retorted: "It is a very idle piece of morality, to lament over Fielding for this low indulgence of his appetite for character. If he had been found quietly at his tea, he would never have left behind him the name he has done. There is nothing of a tea inspiration in any of his novels. They are assuredly the finest things of the kind in the language; and we are Englishmen enough to consider them the best in any language. They are indubitably the most English of all the works of Englishmen."¹⁶

Of Lady Mary's anecdote, Hazlitt wrote (March, 1827), "Lady Mary calls Fielding names, but she afterwards makes atonement by doing justice to his frank, free, hearty nature, where she says 'his spirits gave him raptures with his cook-maid, and cheerfulness when he was starving in a garret, and his happy constitution made him forget every thing when he

¹⁵ *The Quarterly Review*, XIX, 127.

¹⁶ *The Edinburgh Review*, XXXI, 89 (December, 1818).

was placed before a venison-pasty or over a flask of champagne.'"¹⁷ Thus he passes unsuspectingly over Lady Mary's sneer; and, in fact, transmutes it into a compliment.

But whatever Hazlitt might think of the man, the reputed "lowness" of the novels never, except at first, gave him any serious concern; early and late he strove to hold back the on-rushing movement of "senseless fastidiousness" into which the desire for refinement in books and life was passing. In his essay "On Respectable People," August, 1818, he says, "We spurn at virtue in rags; and lick the dust in the presence of vice and folly in purple. . . . Parson Adams, drinking his ale in Sir Thomas Booby's kitchen, makes no very respectable figure; but Sir Thomas himself was right worshipful, and his widow a person of honour! A few such historiographers as Fielding would put an end to the farce of respectability, with others like it. . . . The character of Captain Blifil, his epitaph, and funeral sermon, are worth tomes of casuistry, and patched up theories of moral sentiments."¹⁸ In July, 1820, he writes: "The gentlemen in the gallery, in Fielding's time, thought every thing *low*. . . . We have no notion of condescending in any thing we write about: we seek for truth and beauty wherever we can find them, and think that with these we are safe from contamination."¹⁹ In fact, one of Hazlitt's last utterances in regard to Fielding consists of a protest against that "affectation of gentility" which proscribed his novels as "low," and of a prophecy regarding the eternal quality of *Tom Jones*. The passage occurs in *The Atlas* for September 27 and October 4, 1829, as one of his "Trifles Light as Air": "It has been made a subject of regret that in forty or fifty years' time (if we go on as we have done) no one will read Fielding. What a falling-off! Already, if you thoughtlessly lend *Joseph Andrews* to a respectable family, you find it returned upon your hands as an improper book. . . . The worst

¹⁷ Waller and Glover, XII, 155 note.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XI, 435-436.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 454-455.

is, that this senseless fastidiousness is more owing to an affectation of gentility than to a disgust at vice. It is not the scenes that are described at an alehouse, but the *alehouse* at which they take place that gives the mortal stab to taste and refinement. One comfort is, that the manners and characters which are objected to as *low* in Fielding have in a great measure disappeared or taken another shape; and this at least is one good effect of all excellent satire—that it destroys 'the very food whereon it lives.' The generality of readers, who only seek for the representation of existing models, must therefore, after a time, seek in vain for this obvious verisimilitude in the most powerful and popular works of the kind; and will be either disgusted or at a loss to understand the application. People of sense and imagination, who look beyond the surface or the passing folly of the day, will always read *Tom Jones*."²⁰

No one can doubt Hazlitt's genuine regard for Fielding who will turn to his essay on the "Spirit of Obligations"—written (1824) during the full flush of his genius—and will read a passage in which the critic acknowledges an "obligation" to "the late Mr. Justice Fielding," who bore "a strong resemblance to his father, the immortal author of *Tom Jones*," and yet had also "something of the air of Colonel Bath." To Hazlitt, who often used to see him "sunning himself" in St. James's Park, "he looked serene and smiling to his latest breath, conscious of the goodness of his own heart, and of not having sullied a name that had thrown a light upon humanity. . . . I never passed him, that I did not take off my hat to him, in spirit. I could not help thinking of Parson Adams, of Booth and Amelia."²¹

²⁰ Waller and Glover, XII, 374. In naming his article, was not Hazlitt thinking of Fielding's quotation from *Othello* (*Amelia*, Book VI, ch. v)?

²¹ *Ibid.*, VII, 84. George Nelson, Jr., in an account of the funeral of Lord Nelson (1805), characterizes William (who rode in the "third" coach) as "son to the great Fielding."—*The Nelsons of Burnham Thorpe*, London, New York, 1911, p. 245.

LAMB

Hazlitt says that the greatest triumph he ever enjoyed was in convincing Lamb, after a series of discussions extending over several years, that Fielding was better than Smollett. That he should ever have esteemed *Roderick Random* above *Tom Jones* has been regarded by Canon Ainger and other excellent modern critics as a peculiar circumstance; yet certain conjectures regarding this early preference may be hazarded. "For the Scotch novels," wrote Talfourd, Lamb "cared very little" (though he "heartily rejoiced in the greatness" of Scott's "fame"), having no mind "to be puzzled with new plots, and preferring to read Fielding, and Smollett, and Richardson, whose stories were familiar, over and over again, to being worried with the task of threading the maze of fresh adventure."²² Perhaps Lamb objected also to Fielding's commentary. In one of his letters (1801) to Wordsworth, he speaks of the "fault" of "many novelists," who "continually put a sign post up to shew where you are to feel." Very "different," he says, are "Robinson Crusoe, the Vicar of Wakefield, Roderick Random, and other beautiful, bare narratives."²³ To these reasons may be added a third—Lamb's predilection for humorous eccentricity; what he reverted to most frequently and affectionately in Fielding's works was the character of Parson Adams.²⁴ The indications are, however, that Lamb's conversion by Hazlitt was not ineffectual. In 1811, while upholding the claims of Smollett, he declared that Hogarth's prints were "analogous to the best novels of

²² *The Works of Charles Lamb . . . and a Sketch by . . . Talfourd*, New York, 1845, I, 321. Hazlitt said, "He does not go deep into the Scotch novels, but he is at home in Smollet or Fielding."—Waller and Glover, IV, 365.

²³ *The Works of Charles . . . Lamb*, edited by Lucas, London, 1905, VI, 209.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 86 ("Genius of Hogarth"); I, 136 ("Confessions of a Drunkard"); II, 4 ("The South-Sea House"); II, 43 ("All Fools' Day"); etc.

Smollett or Fielding";²⁵ yet eighteen years later when (in the "Estimate of De Foe's Secondary Novels")²⁶ he repeated his Hogarth-Fielding analogy, he dropped out Smollett's name entirely. In short, to judge from the references in his works between 1811 and 1829, the novels of Fielding grew in Lamb's esteem until they held the place of honor. It is true that in "Imperfect Sympathies" (1821)²⁷ he takes Smollett's fellow countrymen to task for not appreciating a "great genius"; but his heartier enthusiasm seems to have been reserved for Fielding. In "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" (1822), he awards him the first place in his list of "Great Nature's Stereotypes"—"Fielding, Smollet, Sterne," whose "self-reproductive volumes" we see "individually perish with less regret, because we know copies of them to be 'eterne.'"²⁸ And later on during the same year in a letter to Bernard Barton (December, 1822), Smollett again entirely disappears; "O to forget Fielding, Steele, &c.," he exclaims, "and read 'em new."²⁹ Whatever may have been his earlier preference, it was Fielding, rather than Smollett, for whom he had, during the period of his greatest literary achievement the strongest real affection.

Not much does Lamb have to say about *Amelia*; but on the subject of *Joseph Andrews* and of *Tom Jones* he is always hearty. His friend Cary, he wrote Manning, has "but two vices, which in any less good than himself would be crimes past redemption," the first of these vices being that he "has no relish for Parson Adams—hints that he might not be a very great Greek scholar after all (does Fielding hint that he was a Porson?)."³⁰ In the *Essays of Elia* (1822) it was not *Roderick Random* but *Tom Jones* over which he became eloquent.

²⁵ *The Works of Charles . . . Lamb*, edited by Lucas, I, 86.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 327.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 173, 414.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, VII, 588.

³⁰ *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, edited by Ainger, London, 1888, II, 298. Lucas dates the letter to Manning "1832" (*The Life of Charles Lamb*, II, 52); Ainger's date is May 10, 1834.

"How beautiful to a genuine lover of reading," he exclaims, "are the sullied leaves, and worn out appearance, nay, the very odour (beyond Russia), if we would not forget kind feelings in fastidiousness, of an old 'Circulating Library' Tom Jones, or Vicar of Wakefield! How they speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight! . . . Who would have them a whit less soiled? What better condition could we desire to see them in?"³¹ That Lamb held Goldsmith's Vicar in less esteem than Fielding's Parson is shown by a conversation he once had with Cary, when he told him, that, though he was perhaps as good as Dr. Primrose, he was not so good as Parson Adams.³²

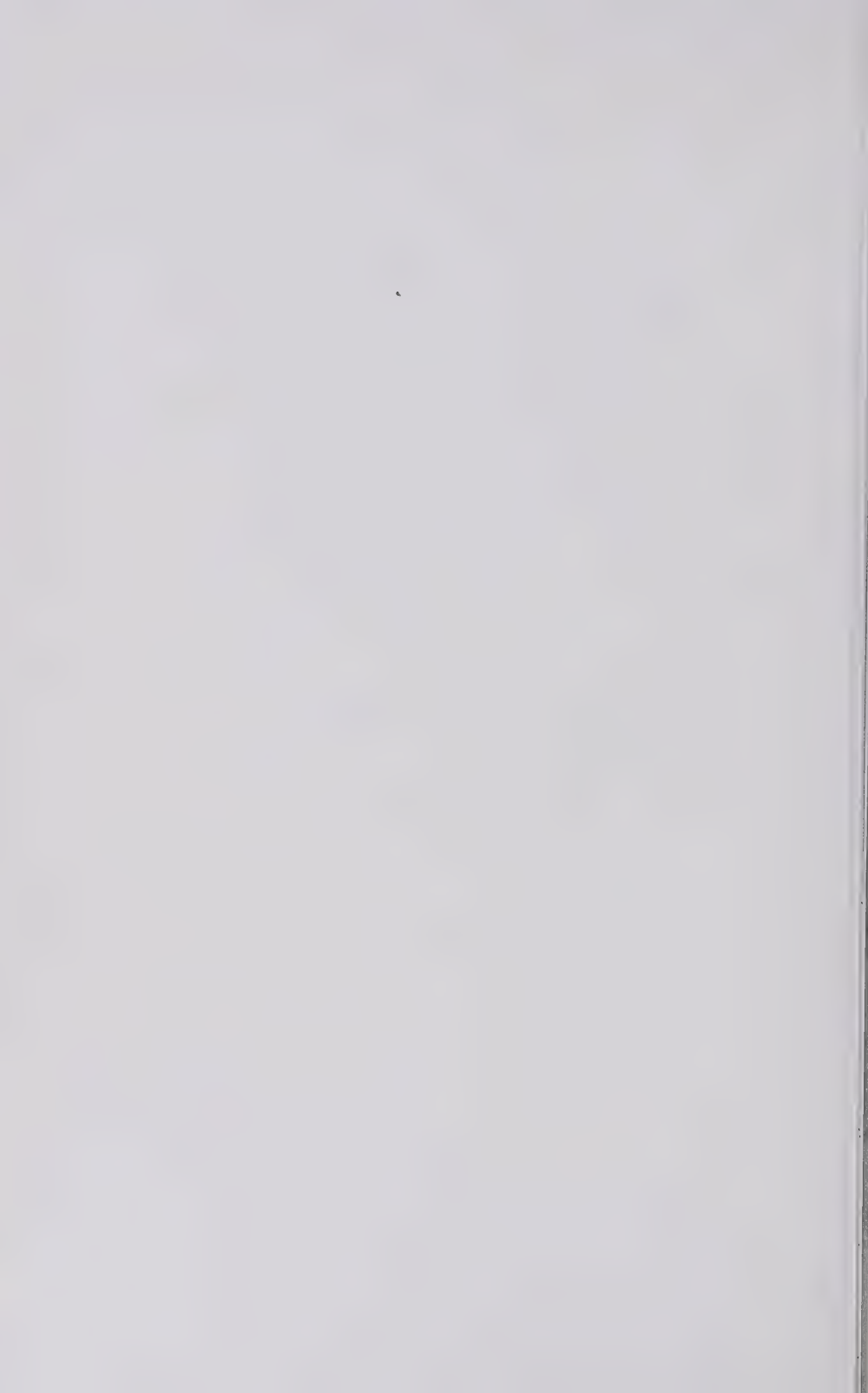
Of Fielding's essential wholesomeness Lamb was no more in doubt than was Hazlitt. Even in the early years he declared (1811) that "One cordial honest laugh of a Tom Jones absolutely clears the atmosphere that was reeking with the black putrifying breathings of a hypocrite Blifl. . . . One 'Lord bless us!' of Parson Adams upon the wickedness of the times, exorcises and purges off the mass of iniquity which the world-knowledge of even a Fielding could cull out and rake together."³³ Nor was he, like Hazlitt, dazzled by Lovelace. As early as 1808 he wrote,³⁴ "The precise, strait-laced Richardson has strengthened Vice, from the mouth of Lovelace, with entangling sophistries and abstruse pleas against her adversary Virtue, which Sedley, Villiers, and Rochester, wanted depth of libertinism sufficient to have invented." By manfully opposing himself to the affectation of gentility—which found its source in the refinement of manners and was strengthened by the popularity of Scott's romances—Lamb endeavored to hold in check the main adverse current that, in his day, was threatening Fielding's reputation as a novelist and as a man. "The livelier pictures and incidents . . . in Fielding," he says

³¹ *The Works*, edited by Lucas, II, 173, 414.

³² Lucas's *The Life of Charles Lamb*, New York and London, 1905, II, 52.

³³ *The Works*, edited by Lucas, I, 83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 43.



more than once,³⁵ "tend to diminish that 'fastidiousness to the concerns and pursuits of common life, which an unrestrained passion for the ideal and the sentimental is in danger of producing.'" As will be seen, the tide of fastidiousness swept on past Lamb; and, during the Victorian Age, came nigh overwhelming Fielding.

COLERIDGE

Enthusiastic for Fielding as Hazlitt and Lamb both were, none of their *dicta* about him ever gained the reputation or had the influence which came in after years to the pronouncements of Coleridge. Yet the fact is not generally known that Coleridge was at first a Richardsonian, that in his earlier days he considered Richardson more profound than Fielding, and that it was not until the last years of his life and after considerable reflection and deep study that he reached the summit of his praise. It is interesting to observe the steps in this evolution.³⁶

Mention has previously been made of the earliest notable reference to Fielding by Coleridge, a poetical one, in which the author praised the realism of *Amelia* (? 1792). But in spite of this early admiration for the pattern wife, Coleridge seems to have been more impressed by the heroines of Richardson; in 1798, as we have seen, young Hazlitt found that his idol "liked Richardson, but not Fielding," and would not yield to argument.³⁷ Even after being shocked in 1805 by the *Correspondence* which Mrs. Barbauld gave to the world, and after describing in detail in his journal—in a passage given before—the vileness of Richardson's "mind," and declaring himself "vexed" that he "must admire, 'aye, greatly admire" him, he still preferred the author of *Clarissa* to the author of *Tom Jones* (whose talent was "observation, not meditation").

³⁵ *The Works*, edited by Lucas, I, 327 ("De Foe's Secondary Novels," 1829). Lamb quotes incorrectly from his own "Hogarth" (1811), I, 86.

³⁶ Acknowledgment is made to the University of California Press for permission to use parts of my article in *The . . . Gayley Anniversary Papers*, Berkeley, 1922, pp. 155-163.

³⁷ Waller and Glover edition of Hazlitt, XII, 274.

But Mrs. Barbauld presumed a little too much upon Coleridge's admiration for Richardson when she desired him to tell her in what respect her favorite was inferior to Shakespeare. The reply he then made we do not know; but in one of the Shakespeare lectures of 1808 he "quoted Mrs. Barbauld under the appellation of 'an amiable lady,'" and—in the words of Crabb Robinson—made the following explanation: "Richardson . . . evinces an exquisite perception of minute feeling, but there is a want of harmony, a vulgarity in his sentiment; he is *only* interesting. Shakspeare on the contrary elevates and instructs." Coleridge "took occasion," continues Robinson, "on mentioning" Richardson "to express" his opinion "of the immorality of his novels." "The lower passions of our nature are kept through seven or eight volumes," he says, "in a hot-bed of interest. Fielding's is far less pernicious; 'for the gusts of laughter drive away sensuality.'" ³⁸

In 1809, while pointing a moral in *The Friend* for August 10, Coleridge recalled an apt illustration from *Tom Jones*. "Blifil," he says, "related accurately Tom Jones's riotous joy during his benefactor's illness, only omitting that this joy was occasioned by the physician's having pronounced him out of danger. Blifil was not the less a liar for being an accurate *matter-of-fact* liar. *Tell-truths* in the service of falsehood we find everywhere." ³⁹ Here was a bit of wisdom which argued that Fielding was more than a mere observer; in fact, using a similar incident as a test, Coleridge long afterwards elaborated the idea that in "no writer" is the "momentous distinction" between character and conduct "so finely brought forward as by Fielding." In 1809, however, he had not sufficiently pondered the matter.

A year or two later, in the *Lectures on Shakspeare* of 1811-12, Coleridge went so far as to say, "I honour, I love, the works of Fielding as much, or perhaps more, than those of any other writer of fiction of that kind: take Fielding in his

³⁸ *The Complete Works of . . . Coleridge*, edited by Shedd, New York, 1853, IV, 226. Who originated this *dictum*? Lamb's *Hogarth* appeared in 1811.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 54-55.

characters of postillions, landlords, and landladies, waiters, or indeed, of anybody who had come before his eye, and nothing can be more true, more happy, or more humorous." But he still regards the novelist as a mere observer. "In all his chief personages," he continues, "Tom Jones for instance, where Fielding was not directed by observation, where he could not assist himself by the close copying of what he saw, where it is necessary that something should take place, some words be spoken, or some object described, which he could not have witnessed (his soliloquies for example, or the interview between the hero and Sophia Western before the reconciliation) and I will venture to say, loving and honouring the man and his productions as I do, that nothing can be more forced and unnatural: the language is without vivacity or spirit, the whole matter is incongruous, and totally destitute of psychological truth."⁴⁰ The opinion that Fielding's genius was limited to observation was again expressed in the lectures on Shakespeare at Bristol (1813-14). "In observations of living character, such as of landlords and postilions,"⁴¹ he says (according to the report of his discourse), "Fielding had great excellence, but in drawing from his own heart, and depicting that species of character which no observation could teach, he failed in comparison with Richardson, who perpetually placed himself as it were in a day-dream."

When the *Biographia Literaria* appeared (1817), however, Coleridge had turned far enough away from Richardson to write that "the loaded sensibility, the minute detail, the morbid consciousness of every thought and feeling in the whole flux and reflux of the mind, in short, the self-involution and dreamlike continuity of Richardson,"⁴² were in part responsible for the "orgasms of a sickly imagination" to be found in the German dramatists at the time of Schiller's *Robbers*. Fielding, on the other hand, seems to have been gaining in

⁴⁰ *Lectures and Notes on Shakspeare*, London, Bohn's Library, 1904, Lecture VII, p. 88.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Lecture I, pp. 465, 466.

⁴² *Biographia Literaria*, London, 1817, II, 258-259.

favor. In his stricture on Wordsworth for undue attention to biographical details, Coleridge implies Fielding's artistic excellence by comparing him with Defoe, whose *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* were "meant to pass for histories," not for such novels as "a Tom Jones, or even a Joseph Andrews."⁴³ To the emphasis which Fielding laid upon goodness as opposed to elegance he had again referred sometime before this in a little critique entitled "A Good Heart." He was very much pleased, he says, with Thomas Abbt's remarks upon that subject and particularly with that author's "counterposition of Tom Jones and Sir Charles Grandison."⁴⁴

In 1820, while the vogue of Scott was overshadowing the reputations of all former novelists, Coleridge again looked back to Parson Adams and declared, in a letter to Allsop,⁴⁵ that the author of *Waverley* had not produced his equal. He asserted, moreover, that a "higher degree of intellectual activity"⁴⁶ was necessary for the "admiration of Fielding" than for an appreciation of Scott. This excellent observation is vitiated, however, by the fact that as regards intellectual substance Coleridge subordinates Scott not only to Fielding but also to Sterne and even to Richardson. Furthermore, in a list of male characters that in his opinion are better than Scott's we find not only Parson Adams but also Lovelace; while his list of female characters excludes all of Fielding's women, even Amelia, and includes Richardson's Miss Byron, Smollett's Tabitha Bramble, and even Mrs. Bennett's Betty. In this criticism, made in 1820, Coleridge allows Parson Adams and his creator the place of honor; but it is obvious that he has not yet fully perceived the difference in altitude between Fielding and that novelist's contemporaries.

It was during the period from 1820 to 1834 (the year of

⁴³ *Biographia Literaria*, II, 147.

⁴⁴ Coleridge's *Table Talk and Omniana*, Oxford Press, London, 1917, p. 400.

⁴⁵ *Biographia Epistolaris*, Bohn's Library, London, 1911, II, 184-185.

⁴⁶ In January, 1821, he repeats this observation, declaring that it is no "fancy or croaking of my own."—*Letters*, New York, 1836, p. 92.

his death), while he was living at Highgate, that Coleridge's appreciation of Fielding rose to its culmination in the famous praise which everyone knows. At this time the vogue of Scott was greater than that enjoyed by any novelist since the days of Richardson. Coleridge read the romances as they appeared with a lively interest; in 1820 (in the letter to Allsop just quoted) he declared that the "number of characters *so good*" produced by "one man" and "in so rapid a succession, must ever remain an illustrious phenomenon in literature"; in 1822 he thought "Old Mortality and Guy Mannering the best of the Scotch novels";⁴⁷ and at the close of his life, during a painful illness, he said that almost the only books which he could bear reading at such a time were the works of Scott. But he never regarded Scott as Fielding's equal.

Coleridge's position in this respect was similar to that of Lamb and Hazlitt, neither of whom was swerved from his regard for Fielding by the vogue of Sir Walter. So much was Fielding's star in the ascendant even during the earlier years of Scott's popularity, that Thomas Dibdin the dramatist declared in 1826 that it was "a sort of high treason to imagine a fault" in the "prince of novelists," "just as it would be to say a syllable derogatory to Shakspeare."⁴⁸ The Seer of Highgate, it may be imagined, noted this enthusiasm with satisfaction; and when, during the last years of his life, the adverse current had set in more strongly against Fielding's novels, he came forward with a very carefully reasoned defense. "Even in this most questionable part of *Tom Jones*" [*i.e.*, the Lady Bellaston episode, Book XV, ch. ix], he wrote, "I cannot but think, after frequent reflection on it, that an additional paragraph . . . would have removed in great measure any just objection, at all events relating to Fielding himself, by taking in the state of manners in his time."⁴⁹ "I do loathe the cant,"

⁴⁷ *The Complete Works*, VI, 256.

⁴⁸ *Reminiscences of Thomas Dibdin*, New York, 1828, II, 158.

⁴⁹ Mr. Dobson, who transcribed this passage, says that the copy of Fielding in which it was written (the edition of 1773) "has Gillman's book-plate."—*Fielding*, New York, 1883, pp. 125-126.

he exclaims, "which can recommend Pamela and Clarissa Harlowe as strictly moral, though they poison the imagination of the young with continued doses of *tinct. lyttæ*, while Tom Jones is prohibited as loose. I do not speak of young women;—but a young man whose heart or feelings can be injured, or even his passions excited, by ought in this novel, is already thoroughly corrupt. There is a cheerful, sunshiny, breezy spirit that prevails everywhere, strongly contrasted with the close, hot, day-dreamy continuity of Richardson. . . . In short, let the requisite allowance be made for the increased refinement of our manners,—and then I dare believe that no young man who consulted his heart and conscience only, without adverting to what the world would say—could rise from the perusal of Fielding's Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, or Amelia without feeling himself a better man;—at least, without an intense conviction that he could not be guilty of a base act." Then comes the praise for Fielding's exaltation of character above conduct. Citing the instance of Blifil's restoration of "Sophia's poor captive bird," he continues, "If I want a servant or mechanic, I wish to know what he does:—but of a friend, I must know what he is. And in no writer is this momentous distinction so finely brought forward as by Fielding. We do not care what Blifil does;—the deed, as separate from the agent, may be good or ill; but Blifil is a villain;—and we feel him to be so from the very moment he, the boy Blifil, restores Sophia's poor captive bird to its native and rightful liberty."⁵⁰

Coleridge's numerous remarks on Fielding were not confined to *Tom Jones*; a set of notes on *Jonathan Wild*,⁵¹ dated February 27, 1832, show how great was his interest in the novelist during the last years of his life. Finally, on July 5, 1834, three weeks before his death, Coleridge exclaimed: "What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the Alchemist,⁵² and

⁵⁰ *The Complete Works*, IV, 380, 381.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 382-383.

⁵² On February 17, 1833, he had said of Ben Jonson, "Some of

Tom Jones, the three most perfect plots ever planned. And how charming, how wholesome, Fielding always is! To take him up after Richardson is like emerging from a sick-room heated by stoves into an open lawn on a breezy day in May."⁵³

The second great pronouncement (more influential than that of Gibbon) had been made upon the art and "morality" of Fielding's novels; it was a deliberate judgment upon matters which Coleridge had pondered for over a generation. When he said, "We do not care what Blifil does;—the deed, as separate from the agent, may be good or ill," he seized upon that shifting of accent from conduct to character which brought Fielding in direct opposition to the popular teaching of Richardson and of mid-eighteenth century formalists in general. By observing that in "no writer is this momentous distinction so finely brought forward as by Fielding," Coleridge ran counter to the still prevalent idea that it was Richardson and not Fielding who was the profound moralist. But the boldest stroke of all was his charge that the much-vaunted *Clarissa* was actually poisonous to the mind.

A word in detail should now be said regarding the annotations upon *Jonathan Wild*; with Lamb and Hazlitt and unlike Scott, Coleridge was not blind to the merits of that masterpiece, which in his opinion "is assuredly the best of all the fictions in which a villain is throughout the principal character."⁵⁴ He appreciates the difficulty of the task that Fielding set himself: "How impossible it is by any force of genius to create a sustained attractive interest for such a ground-work, and how the mind wearies of, and shrinks from, the more than painful interest, the *μισητόν*, of utter depravity,—Fielding himself felt and endeavored to mitigate and remedy by

his plots, that of the Alchemist, for example, are perfect." Mr. J. W. Draper suggests (M. L. P., XXXVI, 399, September, 1921) that "probably Coleridge drew from Pye" [*A Commentary Illustrating the Poetic of Aristotle*, London, 1792, pp. 182-183] his *obiter dictum* on the perfection of the plot of *Tom Jones*.

⁵³ *The Complete Works*, VI, 521 ("Table Talk").

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 382-383 (February 27, 1832).

the (on all other principles) far too large a proportion, and too quick recurrence, of the interposed chapters of moral reflection, like the chorus in the Greek tragedy,—admirable specimens as these chapters are of profound irony and philosophical satire.” In his judgment, “Chap. VI, Book 2, on Hats,—brief as it is, exceeds any thing even in Swift’s *Lilliput* or *Tale of the Tub*.” Remembering Coleridge’s praise of the style of Swift in his “Lectures,” we can appreciate the value of this remark. What is chiefly to be noted in his account of *Jonathan Wild* is that his first concern, as in his criticism of *Tom Jones*, is to seize upon Fielding’s artistic purpose. While the romantic and unphilosophical Scott, looking into the book as in a glass darkly, could see nothing but a picture of unrelieved villainy, Coleridge, who appreciated in all its bearings the force of Fielding’s moral satire, was probing into minute details of its structure. “Whether the transposition of Fielding’s scorching wit (as B. iii, c. xiv.) to the mouth of his hero be objectionable,” he writes, “on the ground of *incredulus odi*, or is to be admired as answering the author’s purpose by unrealizing the story, in order to give a deeper reality to the truths intended,—I must leave doubtful, yet myself inclining to the latter judgment.” In thus applying to every detail the standard of the author’s total artistic significance, Coleridge stands head and shoulders above every other writer thus far mentioned.

By way of summary of the attitude toward Fielding of the great critics—Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt—we observe, in the first place, that all three were, originally or eventually, enthusiastic to eloquence over the novelist’s art. Charles Lamb was particularly fond of Parson Adams; Hazlitt drew attention to what he called Fielding’s *double entendre* of character; Coleridge, who began with a prejudice against him, became in the end his greatest champion—praising the plot of his *Tom Jones* as one of the three best in the world, his health and sanity, and his wonderful style. It is true that none of these three critics clearly perceived the real difference in stature between Fielding and his fellows—*that* had to be left for a later

period—nor can we believe that any of them had that conception of Fielding the Man which has been growing ever clearer during our own generation; but all three came to the opinion that Fielding the Artist ranked second to none of his contemporaries—Richardson, Smollett, or Sterne. Moreover, all three joined in repudiating the idea of the previous century (and, to a great extent, of their own age) that the works of Fielding were immoral—while those of Richardson were moral—and stoutly defended their wholesomeness. Lastly, it is to be observed, that the popularity of Scott, the "King of the Romantics," despite the fact that this was the romantic period *par excellence*, did not turn any one of them a hair's breadth from his high opinion of that professed foe to the marvelous, Henry Fielding.

Still, as ill luck would have it, the influence of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt in the cause of Fielding was not, for one reason or another, greatly perceptible while any one of them was alive. Coleridge's famous praise was confined to *marginalia* and table-talk that were not published until after his death. Lamb's *Elia*, which contained the eloquent passage on *Tom Jones*, did not enjoy a second edition during the author's lifetime. Finally, Hazlitt's essay on the "Novelists," reprinted in his *English Comic Writers*, was obliged to wait for its triumph until later in the century. This delay was due in part to the many animosities which were felt toward the author; but in 1824 so little known was the famous criticism that John Galt, who in that year appropriated the original *Edinburgh* article for his *Bachelor's Wife*,⁵⁵ declared that the author was Francis Jeffrey, despite the fact that the title-page of the 1819 volume specifically read, "By William Hazlitt." It is a significant fact that Thomas Roscoe, who compiled the memoir for the one-volume edition of Fielding in 1840, utterly ignored Lamb, Hazlitt, and even Coleridge (whose *Table-Talk* had appeared only a few years before).

The popular attitude toward Fielding during the vogue of

⁵⁵ *The Bachelor's Wife* . . . By John Galt, Esq., Edinburgh, 1824, pp. 405-427.

Scott (1814-1832) was not so friendly as that of these three great critics. Nor is this surprising: Leslie Stephen was right when he said that English fiction took a new beginning with *Waverley*; and our wonder is, that, in the full flush of romanticism, in the period of Scott and Keats, the realistic Fielding should have risen in the minds of three of the greatest critics which England had produced to a higher position than he had thus far attained. Before turning to the lesser lights—the men who used the romances of Scott as a new touchstone on which to try his predecessors—an account should be given of the “Great Unknown” himself, particularly of his own views on Fielding, which, by the way, owing to the writer’s extraordinary popularity, became, for the immediate future, the most influential criticism of the novelist both at home and abroad.

II

WALTER SCOTT

It seems like a further manifestation of that ill luck which pursued Fielding dead as well as alive, that the person to whom it fell to compose the most frequently quoted sketch of his life which appeared during the first generation of the nineteenth century should be a writer whose sympathies were at best imperfect. Scott was a Jacobite, Fielding a Whig; Scott was a romancer, Fielding a realist; Scott tried to minimize the importance of form and plot, Fielding was a master-builder; Scott regarded fiction as simply a means of entertainment, Fielding—vitality in earnest—lacked little of being as much a reformer in his books as in his office as a magistrate. Naturally enough, therefore, we find that Scott’s account of Fielding, though in some respects most commendable, is, in others, exceedingly unfortunate and damaging.

His two most extended criticisms of his great predecessor are, of course, the two Ballantyne “Lives” (1821)—the *Fielding* and the *Smollett*; but these should be supplemented by the introductory epistle to *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), the

foreword to *The Monastery* (1830), and various references scattered through his *Journal*, his *Letters*, and Lockhart's *Life*. With the biographical part of the Ballantyne *Fielding* we are not here concerned; but it may be remarked in passing that Scott seems to go out of his way, in his brief sketch, to make derogatory insinuations against Fielding's character. He was greatly impressed, apparently, by the stories of Walpole and Lady Mary, whose tales about the novelist had been put in circulation not long before and had run the rounds of the periodicals; and though he exclaimed against Richardson's malignity he did not hesitate to print what that writer said to Fielding's sister about her brother's "lowness." Among the materials which Scott had before him were Murphy's unfortunate "Essay," the ill-natured biography of Watson, and the injurious accounts of Mrs. Barbauld and her brother; he made use, however, of John Nichols's article and of the admirable essay by Hazlitt. In the way of research he did absolutely nothing, the biographical part of his "Life" being a hasty compilation; as he told Lady Louisa Stuart⁵⁶—modestly but truthfully—the "Lives" were "rather flimsily written," *done "merely to oblige a friend."

The critical part of the *Fielding*, though evidently put together in haste, mainly from suggestions in the works at hand, contains several very excellent passages. Scott has no hesitation in declaring that Fielding (not Richardson) is the "father of the English novel"; and though he presumably borrowed this phrase from Watson, his own position as a writer was such as to give the *dictum* considerable force. Richardson's works, he says, "still dealing in improbable incidents, and in characters swelled out beyond the ordinary limits of humanity," are "but a step from the old romance," while *Tom Jones*, the "first English Novel," is "truth and human nature itself." To wipe out with a stroke of the pen that old prejudicial antithesis of "serious" and "comic" (which had held sway from Beattie to Dunlop); to characterize the works of a writer who

⁵⁶ Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of . . . Scott*, Boston and New York (Houghton), 1910, III, 595-596.

even according to Chesterfield never mistook nature as little nearer reality than the old romances; and to proclaim Fielding (rather than Richardson) the "first of British novelists"—was a sufficiently daring procedure in the year 1821; and the Wizard of the North was one of the few magicians potent enough to make these revisions influential. Nor did Scott's good offices end here; annoyed by the constantly reiterated charge that Fielding's masterpiece was an immoral book, he rose to a gallant defense of that author's ethics. The "follies of Tom Jones," he writes, "are those which the world soon teaches to all who enter on the career of life . . . nor do we believe, that, in any one instance, the perusal of Fielding's Novel has added one libertine to the large list." Moreover, though certain pages in the book may offend delicacy, they are "rather jocularly coarse than seductive"; and even these "are atoned for by the admirable mixture of wit and argument, by which, in others, the cause of religion and virtue is supported and advanced."

For the plot and characters Scott expresses great admiration. In "forcible yet natural exhibition of character," Fielding, he says, is "unapproached as yet, even by his successful followers"; also in the handling of plot the author of *Tom Jones* "cannot too often be mentioned with the highest approbation." To him the "felicitous contrivance, and happy extrication of the story, where every incident tells upon, and advances the catastrophe, while, at the same time, it illustrates the characters of those interested in its approach," were a constant marvel. Two exceptions "to this praise" he considers, explaining one and refuting the other. In his opinion, the unnecessary interpolation of "the Story of the *Old Man of the Hill*" was due to a compliance with the custom of Cervantes and Le Sage; while the illegitimacy of Tom Jones was not what the malicious Richardson would have it but simply a device for holding suspense. "For," writes Scott, "had Miss Bridget been privately married to the father of Tom Jones, there could have been no adequate motive assigned for keeping his birth secret from a man so reasonable and compassionate as All-

worthy." Adapting (as so many have) the figure of Arthur Murphy, Scott pictures the reader of *Tom Jones* gliding "down the narrative like a boat on the surface of some broad navigable stream, which only winds enough to gratify the voyager with the varied beauty of its banks."⁵⁷ "But even the high praise due to the construction and arrangement of the story," he continues, "is inferior to that claimed by the truth, force, and spirit of the characters, from *Tom Jones* himself, down to Black George. . . . Amongst these, Squire Western stands alone"; though he "ought not to have taken a beating so unresistingly from the friend of Lord Fellamar." On such a point, as more than one critic has since suggested, Fielding was probably a better judge than his Jacobite censor; but this matter, once so important, is now rather trivial. Much less excusable is Scott's disparagement of *Amelia*. While he pays a tribute to the "feminine delicacy, and pure tenderness" of the heroine, he finds the tale, "on the whole, unpleasing." In *Joseph Andrews*, however, in spite of the "wicked spirit of wit" which prompted it, and of its pedantic mock-heroic style (copied, as Scott thinks, not from Cervantes but from *Scaron*), the "inimitable character of Mr Abraham Adams" is alone "sufficient to stamp the superiority of Fielding over all writers of his class."

Undoubtedly there are good things here, and they are expressed with the author's customary ease and assurance; still, as we put down the essay, we feel that Scott was never quite at the point of view of the man he criticized. Regarding the novel as a "mere elegance" and "luxury" of "polished life," and believing that, although it may "sometimes awaken" the "better feelings and sympathies," it is read ordinarily without "the least hope of deriving instruction" therefrom, he looked for no deeper motive in Fielding than his own romantic fiction possessed. The "professed moral of a piece," he declares,

⁵⁷ In his account of Mackenzie (the Ballantyne *Novels*, V, lii), Scott says, "The reader's attention is not rivetted, as in Fielding's works, by strongly marked character, and the lucid evolution of a well-constructed fable."

"is like the mendicant, who cripples after some splendid and gay procession"—no one regards him. This lack of appreciation of Fielding's ethical motive often leads Scott astray. It leads him to disparage *Jonathan Wild*: "It is not easy," he writes, "to see what Fielding proposed to himself by a picture of complete vice."⁵⁸ It leads him to do scant justice to *Amelia*. Disregarding the *raison d'être* of Booth in the working out of the significance of the book, he dispraises the entire novel because he cannot admire this character *for its own sake*—"We have not the same sympathy for . . . Booth," he declares, "which we yield to the youthful follies of Jones." It leads him to say—missing the central thesis of Fielding's greatest novel—that the "character of Jones" is "unnecessarily degraded by the nature of his intercourse with Lady Bellaston." Finally it leads him to misinterpret the character of the author himself. Earlier in the essay he had quoted unsuspectingly—even approvingly—Lady Mary's aristocratic sneer at Fielding's marriage with his "cook-maid," and (probably recalling that "taint" which was discovered in Fielding's "mind" by Mrs. Barbauld and her brother) had inferred from the "humiliating" Walpole anecdote that the author's "mind had stooped itself completely to his situation." He now asserted that the inclusion of the Lady Bellaston incident in *Tom Jones* inclines "us to believe, that Fielding's ideas of what was gentleman-like and honourable had sustained some depreciation, in consequence of the unhappy circumstances of his life, and of the society to which they condemned him." In his "Life" of Bage, he makes a similar observation: "Fielding, Smollet, and other novelists, have, with very indifferent taste brought forward their heroes as rakes and debauchees, and treated with great lightness those breaches of morals, which are too com-

⁵⁸ Dobson suggests that as Scott may have "found the subject repugnant and painful to his kindly nature," he did not "study the book very carefully," for he entirely ignores the Heartfree family.—*Fielding*, London, 1883, p. 105. As a matter of fact, the idea of a "picture of complete vice" had already been made current by Mudford and other calumniators of Fielding.

monly considered as venial in the male sex." Tom Jones and Booth were portrayed as rakes, he thinks, because the moral sense of their creator was blunted; and what made him sure of this point was the scandalous gossip of Lady Mary and Horace Walpole.

One reason for this misinterpretation of Fielding, as has been suggested, lay in Scott's attitude toward fiction, and, in fact, toward life itself. It was a Coleridge and not a Scott who could interpret and enjoy a satire such as *Jonathan Wild*. And this brings us to the famous *crux* as to why Scott took so much trouble to put Smollett on the same shelf with his great contemporary. Many critics have asserted that he held a brief for Smollett because of his patriotism; and it is true that Scotchmen have been proverbially loyal. Even Carlyle, who shied at Fielding's "morality," declared that one of the "sunniest" days of his life was when he read *Roderick Random*. Moreover, Scott's defense was presumably influenced by the volumes of his compatriot, Anderson, which, he admitted, lay open before him. Still, he was, ordinarily, too generous a man to resort to any wilful sophistry; it is worth while to consider his argument in detail. To begin with, Fielding is far and away the superior in plot construction: "The art and felicity with which the story of *Tom Jones* evolves itself," he writes, "is no where found in Smollett's novels, where . . . the adventures recorded" bear neither "upon each other," nor "on the catastrophe." Nor does Fielding yield the palm in respect to character: "We should do Jones" great "injustice by weighing him in the balance with the savage and ferocious Pickle." By granting superiority to Fielding in regard to both plot and character, Scott would seem to have a hard case to prove; this, however, is what he says: "The deep and fertile genius of Smollett afforded resources" sufficient to make up for these "deficiencies; and when the full weight has been allowed to Fielding's superiority of taste and expression, his northern contemporary will still be found fit to balance the scale with his great rival. If Fielding had superior taste, the palm of more brilliancy of genius, more inexhaustible richness of invention,

must . . . be awarded to Smollett."⁵⁹ Over against this *dictum* we have (as Professor Saintsbury has pointed out) Thackeray's statement in the *Humourists*—"He did not invent much, as I fancy";⁶⁰ and there is probably little question on that score to-day. The real explanation of the *crux* is this: troubled by Fielding's skill as a master-builder, Scott romantically tried to convince himself that a deficit in narrative-bearing might be supplied by quality or by quantity of materials. "There is one way to give novelty: to depend for success on the interest of a well-contrived story," he wrote in his *Journal*. "But woe's me! . . . I shall never be able to take the trouble."⁶¹ "I think there is a demon," he declared in 1822, "who seats himself on the feather of my pen . . . and leads it astray from the purpose."⁶² Fielding, he admits, who "had high notions of the dignity of an art which he may be considered as having founded," achieves perfection of plot in *Tom Jones* and "perhaps 'Amelia' also"; but since other great masters like Smollett and Le Sage "have been satisfied" to arrive at the conclusion "just as the traveller alights at the inn, because it is evening," he (Scott) may be content to follow their example. In 1830, two years before his death, he was still troubled by Fielding's art. "Tom Jones," he writes,⁶³ is the "distinguished example of a story regularly built and consistent in all its parts, in which nothing occurs, and scarce a personage is introduced, that has not some share in tending to advance the catastrophe." He insists, however, that to "demand equal correctness and felicity in those who may follow in the track of that illustrious novelist, would be to fetter too much the power of giving pleasure"; in fact, "*tout genre est permis, hors le genre*

⁵⁹ *The Novels of Tobias Smollett*, Edinburgh (Ballantyne), 1821. The "Prefatory Memoir" (pp. i-xlii) is dated June 1, 1821.

⁶⁰ *The English Humourists*, first ed., London, 1853, p. 249.

⁶¹ *Journal*, New York, 1891, I, 275-276.

⁶² *The Fortunes of Nigel*, Edinburgh and London, 1822, I, xxv-xxvi, xiv, xv.

⁶³ *The Monastery*, Edinburgh and London, 1830, in *Waverley Novels*, XVIII, xxix-xxx (Introduction dated November 1, 1830).

ennuyeux." And then with the next breath he admits that "the more closely and happily the story is combined, and the more natural and felicitous the catastrophe, the nearer such a composition will approach . . . perfection." In a word, Scott's brief for Smollett is, in reality, an apology for himself.

Here is his celebrated contention regarding quantity of work. "Though . . . we may justly prefer *Tom Jones* as the most masterly example of an artful and well told novel, to any individual work of Smollett; yet *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Humphry Clinker*, do each of them far excel *Joseph Andrews* or *Amelia*; and, to descend still lower, *Jonathan Wild*, or *The Journey to the Next World*, cannot be put into momentary comparison with *Sir Lancelot Greaves*, or *Ferdinand Count Fathom*."⁶⁴ The best answer—if any be required—to this contention was given by Gustave Planche, in the year of Scott's death. A *Tom Jones*, he declares, in the course of his article, could not occur twice in the lifetime of any author, since it is the "*résumé de toute une existence*."⁶⁵ So much for *quantity* of materials; but how about *quality* of materials? Why should he exalt *Roderick Random* above *Amelia*, and *Fathom* above *Wild*? This question has given rise to much critical ingenuity; yet—setting aside all other considerations—one reason is sufficiently obvious. In asserting that Smollett possessed more "invention" than Fielding, Scott argued from the romantic premise that more "invention," or "imagination," is required in depicting scenes fashioned of such "sublime" materials as are employed in *Fathom* than in depicting even the most touching scenes in domestic life; as, for example, that in which *Amelia* waits for *Booth*, who does not come. Smollett, in his opinion, is, like *Byron*, "a searcher of dark bosoms"; and, "in general, there is an air of romance in his writings," which raises "his narratives above the level and easy course of ordinary life."⁶⁶ This, apparently, was enough for Scott. It atoned for Smollett's coarseness and bru-

⁶⁴ The Ballantyne *Smollett*, p. xxxix.

⁶⁵ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, V, 355 (1832).

⁶⁶ The Ballantyne *Smollett*, p. xl.

tality, for his lack of plot shaping, and for his—at times—inferior portrayal of character. The suggestion was made not long ago that it was “probably a recognition” of Smollett’s power as a story-teller “which made Scott rank him decidedly too high as a whole.”⁶⁷ Something may be said in favor of this argument; for, though he pays tribute to Fielding’s skill in the construction of plot; on the subject of the initial essays he seems to waver. In his “Life” of Smollett he commends that author for possessing such an “abundance of . . . materials” that he was not obliged to resort to “extrinsic matter,” and for so managing his “delightful puppet-show” that he had no need of “thrusting his head beyond the curtain.” In his “Life” of Fielding, however, he speaks very highly of the initial essays. “Those critical introductions,” he asserts, “which rather interrupt the course of the story, and the flow of the interest at the first perusal are found, on a second or third, the most entertaining chapters of the whole work.”

What Scott wrote of Fielding the Artist is thus a mixture of praise and censure, though some of the praise is very excellent. He first became acquainted with the novels when he was a lad of thirteen;⁶⁸ and on his own last journey he carried with him for solace *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*.⁶⁹ In a letter to Ballantyne, he had written, “My present idea is to go abroad for a few months, if I hold together as long. So ended the Fathers of the Novel—Fielding and Smollett.”⁷⁰ The following passage from Lockhart is of interest at this point: “Sitting that evening [*i.e.*, September 22, 1831] in the library, Sir Walter said a good deal about the singularity that Fielding and Smollett had both been driven abroad by declining health, and never returned—which circumstance, though his language was rather cheerful at this time, he had often before alluded

⁶⁷ Saintsbury’s *The Peace of the Augustans*, London, 1916, p. 138.

⁶⁸ Lockhart’s *Memoirs of . . . Sir Walter Scott*, Edinburgh, 1837, I, 39.

⁶⁹ G. Le Grys Norgate’s *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, London, *n.d.* [1906], p. 318.

⁷⁰ Lockhart’s *Memoirs*, December 8, 1830.

to in a darker fashion; and Mr. Wordsworth expressed his regret that neither of those great masters of romance appeared to have been surrounded with any due marks of respect in the close of life." From the time of *Waverley* until his death, Fielding's novels were pretty constantly in the background of Scott's mind, their excellence of structure troubling him and their subject-matter affording him, in his conversation and correspondence, pleasing reminiscences. He will tuck into a letter, for instance, a reference to the "sapient Partridge";⁷¹ and of Constable he said on one occasion, "Constable is indeed a grand-looking chield. He puts me in mind of Fielding's apology for Lady Booby—to wit, that Joseph Andrews had an air which, to those who had not seen many noblemen, would give an idea of nobility." He was also fond of referring to Fielding's plays, humorously picturing (in 1814) an imaginary meeting between Byron and himself in terms of Grizzle and Tom Thumb;⁷² and making merry at the expense of the readers of *Woodstock* by introducing anachronistically a quotation from *Tumble-Down-Dick*.⁷³ It is unfortunate that Scott, enjoying as he did the works of his great predecessor, should have lent credence to the scandalous gossip of the novelist's malicious contemporaries; we must believe that he never entirely understood what Fielding was trying to do.

At home and abroad, as we have remarked, the various paragraphs in the Ballantyne "Lives" became the most widely known extended utterances on the author of *Tom Jones* for a long time thereafter. His critical *dicta*,—at times excellent, at times astonishingly wide of the mark,—as well as his unfortunate biographical insinuations, were quickly incorporated in reference books not only in England but in France and

⁷¹ *Familiar Letters of . . . Scott*, Edinburgh, 1894, I, 380 (November 22, 1816).

⁷² See Henley's essay, XVI, xxiv note.

⁷³ Scott's *Journal*, New York, 1891, I, 118 note (February 12, 1826); and *Woodstock*, in *Works* ("Dryburgh" ed.), London, 1894, XXI, 302, 480.

Germany, as well as in America. Before Scott himself had assembled the little biographies from the expensive Ballantyne volumes in his book of *Miscellaneous Prose*, the French firm of Galignani had issued the well-known pirated edition of 1825.⁷⁴ Even before this, there had appeared a German translation called *Fielding und Smollett*, by W. von Lindau, at Leipzig in 1824; and in 1826 the "Life of Fielding" did duty in the "Einleitung" to W. von Lüdemann's translation of *Tom Jones*.⁷⁵ In 1828, Scott's memoir was again called upon for the introduction to a French *Tom Jones* published by Dautheray;⁷⁶ and in 1832 J. A. Havard tells the public in a "notice" prefixed to a La Place edition of the novel that "*nous avons emprunté la plus grande partie*" of the article "*de sir Walter Scott*."⁷⁷ In America, the "Fielding" had appeared as early as August, 1824, in the *Museum of Foreign Literature & Science*.⁷⁸ There is much more to the story; but enough has been recorded to suggest Sir Walter's influence (for good and for ill) outside of England upon the fame of Henry Fielding.

Something of the avidity with which Galignani's edition of the *Lives* was seized upon in England is shown by a letter to Scott from Lady Louisa Stuart (Lady Mary's granddaughter), September 4, 1826. "That French *pirate* . . .," she says, "has gathered together in two small volumes your Prefaces to the British Novelists, and published them at Paris, whence some copies have been brought over hither." "Everybody," she writes, is "charmed" with these "prefaces," which nobody she has "met with seems ever to have heard of" before; "all are eager" to get the book "from France"; and if it were possible to procure it in England they would pay

⁷⁴ "Published by A. and W. Galignani," 2 vols., Paris, 1825.

⁷⁵ *Geschichte Tom Jones, eines Findlings*, Erster Theil, Leipzig, 1826.

⁷⁶ *Tom Jones, ou l'Enfant Trouvé*, Tome Premier, Paris, 1828.

⁷⁷ *Tom Jones, ou l'Enfant Trouvé, Imitation de l'Anglais de Fielding*, par de la Place, Paris (Hiard), 1832, I, 6.

⁷⁸ Vol. V (No. 26), pp. 121-138.

"double or treble the price," though—referring to the expensive Ballantyne volumes—they "will not lay out a large sum for the *Gil Blas*, *Clarissas*, and *Tom Joneses* they have by heart already." "I am lately" come, she says, "from a friend's house where these prefaces have been *devoured* by man, woman, and child."⁷⁹

A notable review of Scott's introductory biographies on their original appearance in the Ballantyne *Novelist's Library* came out in the April number of *Blackwood's*, 1824;⁸⁰ this is the article in which the question was asked, "Who reads Richardson?" Was it from the pen of Christopher North himself? At any rate, it voices, apparently, some of the views of that writer. Feeling that Scott has been too lenient with Richardson, the reviewer exclaims, "How few, now-a-days, will wade, or ought to wade, through such a heap of lumber as *Clarissa Harlowe*, merely that they may be able to understand the sublime catastrophe; or to endure the interminable prosing of the Cedar Parlour in *Grandison*, for the sake of *Clementina's* Shakesperian madness. As to *Pamela*, we confess it appears to us to be not only the most unnatural of all English romances . . . but also to be a very singular production indeed, to have come from the pen of the saintly Samuel, and to have found favour with the ladies of England. . . . Sir Walter Scott, we suspect, thinks much as we do about all these matters." The reviewer highly commends Scott's remarks on Richardson's "great rival and contemporary, Fielding," whom the "saintly" printer "hated and abused on all occasions with an unholy rancour." No fault does he find with the "parallel" between Fielding and Smollett, but he insists that the "Great Unknown" is superior to both. "Grant that this nameless author has not produced any one novel so perfect in its shape, plot, and management, as *Tom Jones*," yet "say what is it that any one of his predecessors has done which he has not equalled"; for *Bailie Jarvie* is a match for *Parson Adams*, and

⁷⁹ J. A. Home's *Lady Louisa Stuart*, Edinburgh, 1899, p. 234.

⁸⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine*, XV, 408, 414.

Meg Dodds is the peer of "all the innkeepers, from Don Quixote down to Fielding." Beyond all this, the "Great Unknown" possesses in the "grace, the grandeur, the magnificence" of his prose "all that poetry ever was, or ever can be"; he deserves, therefore, to be ranked with Le Sage and Cervantes, whom "we should not hesitate certainly to place far above both Fielding and Smollett."

Here we have an expression of what was to be an extremely prevalent and tenacious idea for many a decade to come—the idea that Fielding worked in a *genre* inferior to that of the historical romance, and that this "inferiority" was due to a lack of "poetry," "mystery," and "exaltation." The "Ballantyne Library" was not reviewed in the *Edinburgh*; but Francis Jeffrey's attitude in this matter we find elsewhere; he, also, believed that Scott worked in a higher *genre* than did Fielding. And, as was to be expected, so likewise did Scott's son-in-law, Lockhart, who (according to Andrew Lang) wrote the oft-quoted review for the *Quarterly*⁸¹ of September, 1826. Lockhart includes Fielding among the "true classics of the English Novel," and implies throughout that he (and Smollett) attained "the very highest excellence" in that kind of writing; but the whole tone of his scanty references is unsympathetic and even condemnatory. He voices the popular (and then not unnatural) romantic view that the novels of Scott belong to a higher order than the realistic ones of Fielding: "The great novelist of our own time [*i.e.*, Scott] has never framed," he admits, "a plot so perfect as that of Tom Jones; nor has he the wit of a Fielding"; but he regards the author of *Waverley* as not merely a rival but a superior. He is patriotic (and perhaps "romantic") enough to applaud Scott's exaltation of Smollett; and he quotes that labored argument entire. When he came to the question of Fielding's ethics Lockhart waxed very indignant, expatiating upon the havoc wrought by "an immoral literature operating through a long course of years

⁸¹ *The Quarterly Review*, XXXIV, pp. 366-376; see Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, London, 1897, I, 414.

on the individual minds of which society is composed," and scolding his father-in-law severely for over-tolerance, though he makes the happy discovery that not only in his castigation of Bage, but even "in the midst of his apology for Tom Jones" does Sir Walter betray "the dictates of his better reason."

Before going far in this review we meet our old friends, Lady Mary and Horace Walpole, whose stories, it seems, have found an even readier ear with the son-in-law than with the father-in-law. "Perhaps the best of all antidotes," writes Lockhart, "when the youthful admirer of Tom Jones" becomes aware of the working of the poison, is a perusal of Scott's prefatory life, in which he will find glimpses of the real man as given by "Lord Orford" and "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu." The "youthful admirer" will understand, to use Lockhart's words, that "Fielding himself, originally placed by birth, connection and education in the first class of English society, was a man so utterly lowered in his personal feelings, through long worship of pleasure, that at the moment when all England was ringing with the praises of his genius, he could be discovered in his glory (as Lord Orford describes the scene) 'banqueting with a blind man, a wh — — —, and three Irishmen, on some cold mutton and a bone of ham both in one dish, and the dirtiest cloth!'" And "when he hears Fielding's dear friend and relation Lady Mary Wortley Montagu extolling 'the animal spirits that gave him rapture with his cook-maid' . . . he will perhaps come to her ladyship's conclusion that if few men enjoyed life more . . . 'few had less occasion to do so—the highest of his preferment being raking in the lowest sinks of vice and misery.'" Those who had not had access to Scott's prefaces in the "Ballantyne Library" were thus instructed by the influential *Quarterly* in 1826 regarding the "lowness" of Fielding's habits. Walpole and Lady Mary were having it their own way; not even on the part of those who were friendly to the novelist was any disposition shown to investigate the authenticity of the Fielding anecdotes. And there was a prevalent and growing idea that the novels, though

amusing and built by a master craftsman, were—to quote the Aikin-Barbauld-Scott discovery—"tainted" by their author's life.

III

The Rest of the World

HAYDON AND NORTHCOTE

To many of the romantic idealists—painters as well as writers—Fielding's materials seemed as unpoetical as Hogarth's. In the following criticisms—one by Haydon, the other by Northcote, it is Richardson the Idealist, rather than Fielding the Realist, who is the favorite. Haydon says: "‘Tom Jones’ is a delightful novel; it lets you into all the little follies and amiable weaknesses of nature; it shows you that the most virtuous the most pure and innocent woman may have little imperfections, little vanities . . . without corrupting her heart. ‘Tom Jones’ sends you into the world prepared for it and renders you more satisfied with Human Nature. ‘Tom Jones’ points to you that salvation may be attained by abstaining in time; ‘Clarissa Harlowe,’ that destruction must ensue by persisting. Richardson always separates virtue from vice, and renders vice contemptible by associating it with contemptible qualities. Fielding mingles both, and undoubtedly reconciles us more easily to vice by showing us that many undoubted fine qualities may be mixed with it. You relinquish Fielding with hope, but Richardson leaves you in a gloomy agitation. Fielding painted men as they are, Richardson as they ought to be. The characters of Fielding are the result of observation, those of Richardson of imagination and observation. Fielding is the Hogarth of novelists and something higher. Richardson may be called the Raphael of domestic life."⁸² Yet when Haydon read *Clarissa*—putting in, as he tells us, "seventeen hours a day" at that delightful task and holding up the book "so long" that "I stopped the circulation and could not move"—

⁸² *Benjamin Robert Haydon: Correspondence*, Boston, 1877, II, 325-326.

he was in no such judicial state of mind as he exhibits here. "I got up in a fury," he writes, "and wept like an infant, and cursed and d——d Lovelace till exhausted."⁸³

James Northcote, if we may believe Hazlitt, was as great an admirer of Richardson as was Haydon himself, but he was less willing to do justice to Fielding and Hogarth. Hazlitt's *Conversations of James Northcote*, which after their appearance in *The New Monthly Magazine* and *The Atlas* were published in book form⁸⁴ during the painter's lifetime, may not be, of course, entirely authentic; but they deserve inclusion here not only for the interest which they excited at the time but for the completeness with which is expressed (on the part of Northcote) the view of those romantic idealists, old and new, who adored Richardson and disparaged his rival. In the Sixteenth Conversation, while eulogizing Scott, the veteran painter is forced to concede Fielding's superiority in the matter of plot.

NORTHCOTE. All that can be said against Sir Walter is, that he has never made a *whole*. . . . This is one of Fielding's merits: his novels are regular compositions, with what the ancients called a *beginning*, a *middle*, and an *end*: every circumstance is foreseen and provided for, and the conclusion of the story turns round as it were to meet the beginning. *Gil Blas* is very clever, but is only a succession of chapters. *Tom Jones* is a masterpiece, as far as regards the conduct of the fable.

HAZLITT. Do you know the reason? Fielding had a hooked nose, the long chin. It is that introverted physiognomy that binds and concentrates.

NORTHCOTE. But Sir Walter had not a hooked nose, but one that denotes kindness and ingenuity . . . a hooked nose is my aversion.⁸⁵

It is in the Twentieth Conversation that the torrent bursts forth, bringing to the troubled surface some of the old ro-

⁸³ *The Life of* . . . *Haydon*, edited by T. Taylor, New York, 1853, I, 200 (March 3, 1813).

⁸⁴ *Conversations of James Northcote* . . . By William Hazlitt, London, 1830. See Gosse's edition, London, 1894, xxxii-xxxiv.

⁸⁵ Sixteenth Conversation, Waller and Glover Hazlitt, VI, 426.

mantic heresies. Since Cunningham (in his *Life* of Reynolds) has found fault with Sir Joshua for not noticing Hogarth, Northcote exclaims: "Why, it was not his business to notice Hogarth any more than it was to notice Fielding."⁸⁶ Both of them were great wits and describers of . . . common life, but neither of them came under the article of painting . . . [It is surprising that Hazlitt did not challenge this statement.] No, we are to imitate only what is best. . . . What we justly admire and emulate is that which raises human nature, not that which degrades and holds it up to scorn. We may laugh to see a person rolled in the kennel, but we are ashamed of ourselves for doing so. We are amused with *Tom Jones*; but we rise from the perusal of *Clarissa* with higher feelings and better resolutions than we had before. . . .⁸⁷ *Blifil*, and *Black George*, and *Square* . . . have some sense and spirit in them and are so far redeemed, for Fielding put his own cleverness and ingenuity into them; but as to his refined characters, they are an essence of vulgarity and insipidity. *Sophia* is a poor doll; and as to *Allworthy* he has not the soul of a goose: and how does he behave to the young man that he has brought up and pampered with the expectations of a fortune and of being a fine gentleman? Does he not turn him out to starve or rob on the highway without the shadow of an excuse, on a mere maudlin sermonizing pretext of morality, and with as little generosity as principle? No, Fielding did not know what virtue or refinement meant. As Richardson said, he should have thought his books were written by an ostler; or Sir John Hawkins has expressed it still better, that the virtues of his heroes are the virtues of dogs and horses—he does not go beyond that—nor indeed so far, for his *Tom Jones* is not so good as Lord Byron's Newfoundland dog. I have known Newfoundland dogs with twenty times his understanding and good-nature. That is where Richardson has the advantage over Fielding—the virtues of *his* characters are not the virtues of

⁸⁶ Sir Joshua, as has been recorded, *did* notice Fielding though his *praise* was in the form of a concession.

⁸⁷ Waller and Glover *Hazlitt*, VI, 448.

animals—*Clarissa* holds her head in the skies, a 'bright particular star'; for whatever may be said, we have such *ideas*—and thanks to those who sustain and nourish them, and woe to those critics who would confound them with the dirt under our feet and Grub-street jargon! . . . Take away all dignity and grandeur from poetry and art, and you make . . . Hogarth [equal] to Raphael."⁸⁸

In the Twenty-First Conversation the storm still rages.

NORTHCOTE. I find in the last conversation I saw, you make me an admirer of Fielding, and so I am; but I find great fault with him too. I grant he is one of those writers that I remember; he stamps his characters, whether good or bad, on the reader's mind. . . . But to say nothing of Fielding's immorality, and his fancying himself a fine gentleman in the midst of all his coarseness, he has oftener described *habits* than *character*. For example, *Western* is no character; it is merely the language, manners, and pursuits of the country-squire of that day; and the proof of this is, that there is no 'Squire *Western* now. Manners and customs wear out, but characters last forever. . . . I need not explain the difference to you. Character is the ground-work, the natural *stamina* of the mind, on which circumstances only act. . . . *Gil Blas* has character.

HAZLITT. I thought he [Le Sage] only gave professions and classes, players, footmen, sharpers, courtesans, but not the individual, as Fielding often does, though we should strip *Western* of his scarlet hunting-dress and jockey phrases. There is *Square*, *Bliffl*, *Black George*, *Mrs. Fitzpatrick*, *Parson Adams*; and a still greater cluster of them in the one that is least read, the noble peer, the lodging-house keeper, *Mrs. Bennet*, and *Colonel Bath*.

NORTHCOTE. You mean *Amelia*. I have not read that, but will get it. I allow in part what you say; but in the best there is something too local and belonging to the time. But what I chiefly object to in Fielding is his conceit, his consciousness of what he is doing, his everlasting recommendation and puffing of his own wit and sagacity. His introductory chapters make me sick.

⁸⁸ Waller and Glover *Hazlitt*, VI, 452-453. In an omitted conversation (which appeared in *The Atlas*, September 20, 1829), Northcote falls foul of Fielding's description of Sophia.

HAZLITT. Why, perhaps, Fielding is to be excused as a disappointed man. All his success was late in life, for he died in 1754; and *Joseph Andrews* (the first work of his that was popular) was published in 1748 [*sic*]. All the rest of his life he had been drudging for the booksellers, or bringing out unsuccessful comedies. He probably anticipated the same result in his novels, and wished to bespeak the favour of the reader by putting himself too much forward. His prefaces are like Ben Jonson's prologues, and from the same cause, mortified vanity; though it seems odd to say so at present, after the run his writings have had; but he could not foresee that, and only lived a short time to witness it.

NORTHCOTE. I can bear any thing but that conscious look—it is to me like the lump of soot in the broth, that spoils the whole mess. Fielding was one of the swaggerers.

HAZLITT. But he had much to boast of.

NORTHCOTE. He certainly was not idle in his time.⁸⁹

TALFOURD

It is a relief to turn from the grumbling Northcote to a less rabid Richardsonian, the ebullient Talfourd, whose essay on "British Novels and Romances" (it appeared originally in *The New Monthly Magazine*, February 1, 1820) reflects that spirit of enthusiasm which we have previously found in Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt. In his eulogy of Richardson, Talfourd pictures "the good housewife," employed "all her life in the severest drudgery," thinking of the "well-thumbed volume" of *Clarissa*, which she "found, when a girl in some old recess, and read with breathless eagerness, at stolen times and moments of hasty joy."⁹⁰ *Clarissa*, in Talfourd's opinion, is one of the few books which leave us different beings from those which they find us; "sadder and wiser" we "arise from its perusal." In brief, he declares Richardson's works to be "among the grandest and most singular creations of human

⁸⁹ Waller and Glover *Hazlitt*, VI, 457-458.

⁹⁰ This passage is singularly like the one about the seamstress two years later in "Detached Thoughts" (1822) by Lamb (*Works*, edited by Lucas, II, 173).

genius." But Talfourd was also very fair to Fielding. In the following remark, he seems to anticipate Coleridge—at least, *in print*. When "we read Fielding's novels after those of Richardson, we feel as if a stupendous pressure were removed from our souls"; we "seem suddenly to have left a palace of enchantment," illumined "by a light not quite human, nor yet quite divine," and, traveling "on the high road of humanity," to revel again in "the fresh air, and the common ways of this 'bright and breathing world.'" The mock-heroic of Fielding, to his mind, is "scarcely less pleasing than its stately prototype," and though there is not much that "can be called ideal" in him "except the character of Parson Adams," "How vivid are the transient joys of his heroes!" *Tom Jones* is "quite unrivalled in plot, and is to be rivalled only in his own works for felicitous delineation of character." Allworthy is like "one of the best and most revered friends of our childhood"; and "Was ever the 'soul of goodness in things evil' better disclosed, than in the scruples and dishonesty of Black George . . . ? Did ever health, good-humour, frank-heartedness, and animal spirits hold out so freshly against vice and fortune as in the hero?" Was there ever "so plausible a hypocrite as Blifil, who buys a Bible of Tom Jones so delightfully?" Of the wholesomeness of the great novel Talfourd says that while the story of Lady Bellaston is a "blemish," if "there be any vice left in the work, the fresh atmosphere diffused over all its scenes" will "render it innoxious." *Joseph Andrews* has "far less merit" as a story, but Parson Adams is a character that "does the heart good to think on"; he "who drew" this character alone "would not have lived in vain." To conclude, Smollett had more "touch of romance" than Fielding, but no such "profound and intuitive knowledge of humanity's hidden treasures." Thus, worshiper of *Clarissa* as he is, Talfourd joins Lamb, Hazlitt, and Coleridge in the joyful chorus. Very different this paean of praise from the silences and the vilifications of the age to come—the age of Carlyle and Ruskin!

SOUTHEY

Great as was the enthusiasm of Talfourd (and his betters), no one of any note seems to have thought of writing a biography of Fielding except, perhaps, Southey, who, on one occasion, came near making a Fielding "find." Caroline Bowles, it seems, was acquainted with a very old lady—"a living chronicle of the past"—who, intimate as a young woman with Miss Collier, once had in her possession some of Fielding's letters. About two months before this fact was discovered, the old lady, thinking she was about to die, had "destroyed with ruthless unsparingness" the "long-treasured correspondence."⁹¹ Southey was also interested in the other eighteenth-century novelists, particularly in Sterne, whose influence is to be noted in *The Doctor*. One recalls the Shakespearean passage in which the author says jokingly to Miss Graveairs, "Banish Tristram Shandy! banish Smollett, banish Fielding, banish Richardson! But for the Doctor . . . banish not him!"⁹² Like Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt, Southey had the highest regard for Fielding and was fond of quoting from his works. Long before Coleridge had come to his final conclusion about Richardson and Fielding, Southey had written (November 4, 1812), "My own opinion of Richardson is, that for a man of decorous life he had a most impure imagination, and that the immorality of the old drama is far less mischievous than his moral stories of Pamela and Squire Booby (how I like Fielding for making out that name), and of Clarissa."⁹³ Moreover, Southey was one of the first influential literary men (along with Lamb and Scott) to set a high value upon the *Voyage to Lisbon*. In a letter to Caroline Bowles (February 15, 1830), he calls it "the most remarkable example I ever met with of native cheerfulness triumphant over bodily suffering and surrounding circumstances of misery and discomfort." And again (on Whit-

⁹¹ *The Correspondence of Southey and Caroline Bowles*, edited by Dowden, Dublin and London, 1881, pp. 184, 186, 195, 196, 198.

⁹² *The Doctor*, London, 1834, I, 185 (ch. xix).

⁹³ *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, edited by Warton, London, 1856, II, 297.

sunday, 1830) he writes (in another letter to Caroline Bowles): "His account of that voyage is to me the most extraordinary, and perhaps the most interesting of all his works. Never did any man's natural hilarity support itself so marvelously under complicated diseases, and every imaginable kind of discomfort."⁹⁴ In a letter to Sir Egerton Brydges during the same year, Southey tells of meeting (some dozen years before) William Fielding, the magistrate, of whom Hazlitt also wrote. "He received me," says Southey, "in a manner which had much of old courtesy about it, and I looked upon him with great interest for his father's sake."⁹⁵

LEIGH HUNT

An even greater enthusiast than Southey, in fact one of the warmest admirers Fielding has ever had, was Leigh Hunt, whose many allusions to the novelist almost rival in number those of William Hazlitt. Richardson he held in less esteem, though he referred very frequently to scenes and characters in his works; the following passage from *The Indicator* (1821) sounds as though it had been written a hundred years later. Twitting Charles Lamb for considering Richardson "extraordinary," Hunt goes on to say, "[Richardson] was the more extraordinary inasmuch as he writes the most affecting books, in a spirit, which to us at least appears one of the most unfeeling imaginable. He writes seven or eight thick volumes on the tortures of a young woman; and seems at the end as if he could have written seven or eight more, had it been politic as a matter of trade. There is wonderful ability in his books, wonderful knowledge of all sorts of petty proceedings, wonderful variety of character; and with all this one cannot help being interested at a first reading. But in all the finer as well as larger meanings of the word, he wants humanity. He neither knows what vice nor what virtue is, properly speaking. He

⁹⁴ *The Correspondence . . . with Caroline Bowles*, pp. 184, 198.

⁹⁵ *The Autobiography . . . of Sir Egerton Brydges*, London, 1834, II, 267-268. The meeting "must have been in 1817."

even, not infrequently, makes them change sides,—his vice being occupied at any rate in some kind of sympathy with others, while his virtue at bottom thinks of nothing but itself. He does not . . . hurry over an agonizing incident, or touch it with some sweet, unaffected, unconscious superiority to its situation . . . neither does he, like Shakspeare, bring about it all the redeeming graces of poetry and humanity . . . but there is a pettiness and detail of preparation,—a pedantry and ostentation of virtue, even in its retirements,—and a cool never-ending surgical anatomy of suffering, equally destructive, in our minds, of the real dignity of the subject. . . . He wrote like a sentimental familiar of the Inquisition . . . giving off so many sheets an hour with as little wear and tear as a mangle.”⁹⁶ At another time Hunt had said, “There are some books . . . which with all their undoubted genius we would as soon read again, as see a man run the gauntlet from here to Land’s End. The pain is too long drawn out, and the author’s portrait looks too fat and comfortable.”⁹⁷

Not Richardson but Goldsmith, Fielding, and Smollett were, according to the *Autobiography*, the “favourite prose authors” of Hunt’s youth.⁹⁸ Very early in his career he seems to have preferred both Fielding and Smollett to Richardson; for in a letter to Shelley (October 20, 1819) referring to Smollett’s burial at Leghorn, he says, “It is a curious coincidence that our other chief novelist, Fielding, lies buried at Lisbon.”⁹⁹ From 1819 onward, Fielding sat higher and higher in the heart of Leigh Hunt, as may be inferred from many an eloquent passage. Some time before Scott exalted *Fathom* above *Wild*, Hunt had declared in *The Indicator* that *Fathom* was “not at all to our taste,” implying his appreciation of *Jonathan Wild*, which, he says, is caviare “‘to the multi-

⁹⁶ *The Indicator*, No. LXIX, p. 134 (January 31, 1821).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, No. XLI, p. 321 (July 19, 1820).

⁹⁸ *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, edited by Ingpen, Westminster, 1903, I, 158.

⁹⁹ *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, London, 1862, I, 148.

tude.'"¹⁰⁰ Fielding's *Amelia*, too, was also an early favorite with him; as we look down the Dictionary of women's names in No. XVIII of the same periodical, we find the following entry: "Amelia . . . Beloved. The name of Fielding's celebrated conjugal heroine."¹⁰¹ "As to Parson Adams . . .," he writes again, "let everybody rejoice that there has been a man in the world called Henry Fielding to think of such a character, and thousands of good people sprinkled about that world to answer for the truth of it."¹⁰² But it was *Tom Jones* which was Leigh Hunt's prime favorite. James Russell Lowell, in his famous Taunton speech on Fielding, made the statement that the margins of Hunt's copy of the book, then in his possession, were "crowded" with "admiring" comments. We may well believe it, for the published writings of that genial author are sown thick with allusions to the novelist. Looking back over his long life, he says of his early enthusiasm, "I felt though I did not know, till Fielding told me, that there was more truth in the verisimilitudes of fiction than in the assumptions of history."¹⁰³ And in 1853 he declared, only a few years before his death, that he had just read *Tom Jones* "again" with "increased admiration."¹⁰⁴

In more than one instance a fellow liking for Fielding served as an excellent passport to Leigh Hunt's esteem. He was fond of recalling the fact that "Barnes, who stood next me on the Deputy Grecian form" at Christ's Hospital—the Barnes, that is, who became editor of "the *Times* newspaper"—was "famous among us" for "his admiration of the works of Fielding," though he admits that had his friend "cared for anything beyond his glass of wine and his Fielding" he might have "made himself a name in wit and literature."¹⁰⁵ For the attorney-general, Sir Vicary Gibbs, a "little, irritable, sharp-

¹⁰⁰ *The Indicator*, No. XIII (January 5, 1820), p. 101.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, No. XVIII (February 9, 1820), p. 139.

¹⁰² Hunt's *Wit and Humour*, new ed., London, 1890, p. 61.

¹⁰³ *Autobiography*, edited by Ingpen, I, 159.

¹⁰⁴ *The Correspondence*, II, 188 (letter of July 1, 1853).

¹⁰⁵ *Autobiography*, edited by Ingpen, I, 116.

featured, bilious-looking man," who was "none the worse" for "imbuing himself with the knowledge of Fielding," Hunt "had a secret regard," though he had never seen him.¹⁰⁶ And he transcribes with evident pleasure a reference to Allworthy by his friend Leigh, who—to give an idea of the senior Mr. Leigh—quotes the "beautiful passage" from *Tom Jones* beginning, "It was the middle of May, and the morning was remarkably serene."¹⁰⁷

Perhaps Hunt's idea of Fielding the Man was not much better than that of his critical contemporaries, in common with most of whom (except Southey) he cared little for biographical research. "What Lady Mary Wortley¹⁰⁸ said of her kinsman"—"that give him his leg of mutton and bottle of wine, and in the very thick of calamity he would be happy for the time being"¹⁰⁹—was accepted by him without question; and he seems to have heard a similar story about the magistrate William, for he tells us that "Fielding did not love his bottle the less for being obliged to lecture the drunken. Nor did his son, who succeeded him in taste and office."¹¹⁰ Again relying on Lady Mary, he makes the remark in his *Table-Talk* that just as the heroes of Smollett were "caricatures" of their author, so Fielding's "brawny, good-natured, idle fellows" were caricatures "of him."¹¹¹ Still, his belief in the tonic wholesomeness of this "idle fellow's" books was as firm as that of Coleridge and of Lamb. The following allusion, in fact, might have been made by Lamb himself. In a *Literatura Hilaris*, according to Hunt, "Fielding should be the port,"—a "cordial extract of Parson Adams" being as "wholesome" for the heart "as laughter for the lungs."¹¹² In short, the

¹⁰⁶ *Autobiography*, edited by Ingpen, I, 237.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 31.

¹⁰⁸ For Hunt's review of the Wharnccliffe edition, see *London and Westminster Review*, XXVII (1837).

¹⁰⁹ *Autobiography*, edited by Ingpen, I, 18.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 217.

¹¹¹ *Table-Talk*, London, 1851, p. 44.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 185.

characters of Fielding are "immortal people," who belong to the "deathless generations" of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Cervantes. "Are we as intimate, I wish to know, with our aunt, as we are with Miss Western? Could we not speak of the character of Tom Jones in any court in Christendom?" Does not Parson Adams remain "stout and hearty as ever"? It is true that "Sir Charles and My Lady Grandison," very "brilliant and decorous," are guests at Leigh Hunt's "Novel Party," as is also "Mrs. Booby," who revels in her newly acquired station; but the "most delightful" group of people there are "Mr. Abraham Adams"—a "whole body of humanity in himself"—and "all whom he loves."¹¹³

BYRON

Another great lover of Fielding was Lord Byron, whose interest not only in the three major novels but in *Jonathan Wild* and the *Journey to the Next World* is sufficiently proved by checking up the references in the Prothero-Coleridge edition. In 1807 Byron recorded in his journal that he had read "above four thousand novels, including the works of Cervantes, Fielding . . . &c";¹¹⁴ and from then on till the end of his life his interest in the author of *Tom Jones* never waned. Everyone knows the passage in "Don Juan" in which he takes a fling at the "blackguardism" of Tom and the "emphatic" quality of Sophia:

There now are no Squire Westerns, as of old;
And our Sophias are not so emphatic,
But fair as then, or fairer to behold:
We have no accomplished blackguards, like Tom Jones,
But gentlemen in stays, as stiff as stones.¹¹⁵

We may note also a number of passages in his correspondence and in "Don Juan" in which he protests that his own work is

¹¹³ *Men, Women, and Books*, New York, 1847, I, 88, 89, 91, 96.

¹¹⁴ *Letters and Journals*, edited by Tom Moore, London, 1830, I, 98.

¹¹⁵ Canto XIII, st. 110. See "Poetry," VI, 515, in *Works* (Prothero-Coleridge), new ed., London, 1903.

not so immoral as that of Fielding or Smollett. In a letter of March 25, 1821, for example, Byron explains the difference between *vulgarity* and *blackguardism*. "*Vulgarity*," he says, "is far worse than downright *blackguardism*; for the latter comprehends wit, humour, and strong sense at times; while the former is a sad abortive attempt. . . ." "It does not depend upon low themes; or even low language, for Fielding revels in both;—but is he ever *vulgar*? No. You see the man of education, the gentleman, and the scholar, sporting with his subject,—its master, not its slave."¹¹⁶ Especially when "Don Juan" was attacked, was Byron fond of defending his own "blackguardism" by saying that Smollett was "ten times worse" and "Fielding no better." This idea he even incorporated in "Don Juan" itself:

'Tis all the same to me; I'm fond of yielding,
And therefore leave them to the purer page
Of Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding,
Who say strange things for so correct an age.¹¹⁷

Among allusions to *Joseph Andrews* there is the passage in "Don Juan" in which he speaks of

The spouse of Potiphar, the Lady Booby;¹¹⁸

and that other in which he tells us,

. . . A great impression in my youth
Was made by Mrs. Adams, where she cries,
"That Scriptures out of church are blasphemies."¹¹⁹

With Fielding's parsons, by the way, the poet shows himself well acquainted; in an "Advertisement" to his translation of the "Morgante Maggiore," for example, he declares that it is

¹¹⁶ Byron's "Letters," V, 592, in *Works*, Prothero-Coleridge ed., London and New York, 1901.

¹¹⁷ "Don Juan," Canto IV, st. xcvi ("Poetry," VI, 210). See also Byron's letter to Murray, October 25, 1822 ("Letters," VI, 156): "Smollett . . . ten times worse; and Fielding no better."

¹¹⁸ Canto V, st. cxxxi ("Poetry," VI, 254).

¹¹⁹ Canto XIII, st. xcvi ("Poetry," VI, 511).

"as unjust to accuse" the author of that poem of irreligion as to "denounce Fielding for his Parson Adams, Barnabas, Thwackum, Supple, and the Ordinary."¹²⁰ These—and many other references (to *Joseph Andrews*, to *Tom Jones*, to *Amelia*, and to *Jonathan Wild*)—are to be found in the works of Byron; but the *dictum* which caught the popular ear was a parenthetical remark—from the *Journal in Italy*—in which (echoing Murphy, who in turn got the hint from Fielding himself) he characterizes the creator of *Tom Jones* as the "*prose* Homer of human nature." Musing on the circumstance (which came out in a murder trial) that the leaves of *Pamela* had been used as wrapping paper in a grocery store, he exclaims (January 4, 1821): "What would Richardson, the vainest and luckiest of living authors (*i.e.*, while alive)—he who, with Aaron Hill, used to prophesy and chuckle over the presumed fall of Fielding (the *prose* Homer of human nature) and of Pope (the most beautiful of poets)—what would he have said, could he have traced his pages from their place on the French prince's toilets . . . to the grocer's counter and the gipsy-murderess's bacon!!!"¹²¹ This pronouncement was (after the publication of the *Journal*) frequently incorporated in accounts of Fielding—Thomas Roscoe, for example, in 1840, elaborating upon it at some length. Since that time, few admirers of the novelist have neglected to repeat Byron's famous phrase; but the most interesting of all the passages is one which has attracted singularly little notice. Apropos of Fielding's democratic spirit, he writes, in the year 1821, "I have lately been reading Fielding over again. They talk of Radicalism, Jacobinism, etc., in England (I am told), but they should turn over the pages of 'Jonathan Wild the Great.' The inequality of conditions, and the littleness of the great, were never set forth in stronger terms; and his contempt for Conquerors and the like is such, that, had he lived *now*, he would have been denounced in 'The Courier' as the grand Mouth-piece and Factionary of the revolutionists. And yet I never

¹²⁰ "Poetry," IV, 284.

¹²¹ "Letters," V, 147-149.

recollect to have heard this turn of Fielding's mind noticed, though it is obvious in every page."¹²²

Not only in Byron's day but ever since, this "turn of Fielding's mind" toward democracy has, strangely enough, received scant attention from critics. In the eighteenth century, as has been seen, one of the common charges against him was that he was a dangerous "leveller"; yet at the time of the French Revolution his reiterated defense of the rights of man seems to have met with no notable recognition on the part of Godwin and others. How far the ethical notions of the revolutionists actually were from those of Fielding was excellently illustrated by Walter Scott when he asked his readers to place over against Fielding's detestation of the "sophistical hypocrite" Square the admiration of Bage for such "philosophical heroes" as Hermsprong.¹²³ Bage himself acknowledged Fielding's standing as one of the foremost novelists;¹²⁴ but he took little interest in the great man's efforts in the way of social reform. It is evident that Fielding did not go far enough for the radicals; but Coleridge, Hazlitt, Southey, and Hunt, as well as Byron, *did* realize that he was a supreme "lover of liberty," though their recognition of this fact never took a form which aroused much interest.

OTHER POETS

It is a noteworthy fact that the realistic Fielding, who in so many words declared war against the marvellous, stood higher with the writers of poetry during the heyday of romance and romanticism than at any previous period. No doubt the most enthusiastic of all were Coleridge, Byron, Southey, and Leigh Hunt; but few if any of the other poets of note seem to have been antagonistic, nor were they, as a rule, diverted from their appreciation of Fielding by the sentimen-

¹²² "Letters," V, 465 ("Detached Thoughts," No. 116).

¹²³ Scott's "Life" of Bage.

¹²⁴ *Man as He Is*, London, 1792, I, ii. The four novelists he mentions are Le Sage, Marivaux, Fielding, and Smollett.

talities of Richardson or by the vogue of Scott. A more detailed account is now in order. In the diary of Byron's friend Tom Moore there is praise of Fielding—not unmixed, to be sure, but discriminating. During the winter evenings of 1818 Moore and his wife read *Joseph Andrews* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Of Goldsmith's idyll he writes, "What a gem it is! we both enjoyed it so much more than 'Joseph Andrews!'"¹²⁵ He had forgotten, he says, "how gratuitously gross many of the scenes" of the latter novel were;¹²⁶ yet during the perusal he exclaims, "How well Fielding knew human nature when he made the poor frail Betty such a ready and good-natured creature!"¹²⁷ Some time later he recorded his opinion of *Jonathan Wild*. It is "a difficult matter," he says, to "sustain an irony through a whole book, and even here it fails very often: but the humour and the satire are admirable," the dissertation on "hats; and the parties in prison standing up for the liberties of Newgate, all excellent in their way."¹²⁸ In the fall of 1824 he read Fielding's *Journey to the Next World* and was "highly amused," few things, he declares, being "so good as the first half of it."¹²⁹ The character of Parson Adams was a favorite with Moore. Several months after the reading of *Joseph Andrews*, he speaks of finding the poet Bowles "in the bar of the White Hart, dictating to a waiter . . . his ideas of the true sublime in poetry." "Never," says Moore, "was there such a Parson Adams since the real one."¹³⁰

Wordsworth, looking back upon his boyhood recalls with pleasure the perusal of "all Fielding's works."¹³¹ It is true that the "week before he took his degree" at Cambridge "he passed

¹²⁵ *Memoirs . . . of Thomas Moore*, edited by Russell, London, 1853, II, 217 (November 16, 1818).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 203 (October 26, 1818).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 208 (November 1, 1818).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 267-268 (February "2nd to 9th").

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 250 (October 31, 1824).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 280-281 (March 20, 1819).

¹³¹ *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, by Christopher Wordsworth, Boston, 1851, I, 9-10.

his time in reading *Clarissa Harlowe*";¹³² also, that in his famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* he asserted that a "repe-
 rusal of the distressful parts" of *Clarissa* is undertaken with
 "reluctance";¹³³ but he was enough of a lover of Fielding to
 incur the wrath of De Quincey, who sharply reprimanded him
 for reading and remembering "with extreme delight" an au-
 thor "so disgusting."¹³⁴

Shelley, we are told, read Fielding's novels while at Sion House "without finding them interesting";¹³⁵ and in his letters there seems to be a dearth of reference to the novelist. But he found Richardson positively tiresome—as might have been expected, it was Mrs. Radcliffe in whom he particularly delighted. Keats, on the other hand, enjoyed Fielding's novels, though he implies in one of his letters that they seem to him somewhat antiquated. "With what sensation do you read Fielding?" he asks, "and do not Hogarth's pictures seem an old thing to you?" But in another letter (January 5, 1818) he tells his brothers that "the grand parts of Scott are within the reach of more minds than the finest humours" in *Humphry Clinker*; in fact, the "non-sequitur" joke in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which he calls "that fine thing of the Sargeant," gives him "more pleasure than the whole novel of 'The Antiquary.'"¹³⁶

In Landor, there is a famous passage at arms in the "Imaginary Conversation" between Johnson and Horne Tooke:

TOOKE. I would request you to exert your authority in repressing the term *our hero*. These worthy people [the authors of "novels and romances"] seem utterly unaware that the expression turns their

¹³² *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, I, 48.

¹³³ This was not, after all, an unmixed compliment; in Shakespeare, he said, "pathetic" scenes are "never" carried "beyond the bounds of pleasure."—*Lyrical Ballads*, second ed., London, 1800, I, xxxi.

¹³⁴ De Quincey's *Literary Reminiscences*, Boston, 1854, II, 252.

¹³⁵ Adolf Droop's *Belesenheit P. B. Shelley's*, Weimar, 1906, p. 61.

¹³⁶ *Poetry and Prose*, edited by Forman, London, 1890, pp. 115, 80 note, 81 note. Keats has forgotten whether the joke "is Fielding's or Smollet's."

narrative into ridicule. Even on light and ludicrous subjects, it destroys that illusion which the mind creates to itself in fiction; and I have often wished it away when I have found it in *Tom Jones*. While we are interested in a story we wish to see nothing of the author or of ourselves.

JOHNSON. I detest, let me tell you, your difficulties and exceptions. . . . [Fielding's novel is afterwards mentioned again.]

TOOKE. The Irishman in Fielding's *Tom Jones* says, "He bate me."

JOHNSON. What we hear from an Irishman we are not overfond of repeating.¹³⁷

Landor regarded Richardson as a "great inventor" and a master of pathos; but he was apparently much attached to the author of *Tom Jones*, of whom (according to John Forster) he delighted to tell an anecdote—related to him by "Doctor Harrington of *Oceana's* family"—of a dinner at Ralph Allen's at which Fielding, in an aside, ridiculed the pompousness and sycophancy of Warburton. "I doubt," remarks Landor, "whether the double genitive case was ever so justly . . . employed."¹³⁸

OTHER WRITERS

Among other men of letters, poetical or otherwise, we should mention that great admirer of Fielding, James Smith. "The droll anecdote," the "shrewd remark," the "trait of humour from Fielding," writes his brother Horace, "all seemed to come as they were wanted."¹³⁹ Naturally enough James Smith was displeased with Mrs. Barbauld's treatment of Richardson's rival. His own assessment of the comparative excellence of the two novelists may be inferred from the following remark: "Mrs. Barbauld promotes Richardson, without any remorse, over the head of poor Fielding; and Mr. Hayley would fain make his mole-hill Cowper over-top Mount Mil-

¹³⁷ Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, second ed., London, 1826, II, 222, 260.

¹³⁸ John Forster's *Walter Savage Landor*, Boston, 1869, pp. 19-20.

¹³⁹ Beavan, A. H., *James and Horace Smith*, London, 1899, p. 186.

ton."¹⁴⁰ Of more importance than James Smith in the history of fiction, however, is that long since forgotten (but then very popular) brother humorist, Pierce Egan, who was, in a way, a forerunner of Dickens. At the outset of the extraordinary adventures of Jerry Hawthorn and Corinthian Tom, Fielding is invoked as a "true delineator of HUMAN NATURE." Though another Squire Western, declares Egan, is perhaps "not to be met with in the walks of the present day," "let me but produce some similarity towards the *double* of a TOM JONES . . . and the highest pinnacle of my ambition is attained."¹⁴¹

Whether the escapades of Corinthian Tom owe anything to the earlier Tom need not be discussed here; but it is clear that more than one young gentleman of the period was eager to present a modern version of Fielding's celebrated story. T. L. Beddoes, for example, the future poet and dramatist, while at Charterhouse (1817-1818), according to a former schoolmate of his, attempted a novel, never printed, which was "just such an imitation of Fielding's wildest flights, as a clever schoolboy might make, with all the coarseness, little of the wit, and none of the truth of his original."¹⁴²

Other youthful aspirants to literary fame, stimulated by the vogue of the romances of Scott, exerted their maiden pens in essays on the art of fiction, particularly in defenses of the *genre*. The following story, which is to be found in Trevelyan, is told of young Tom Macaulay's anonymous contribution to *The Christian Observer*, a periodical edited by his father, Zachary Macaulay. Retorting to the slanderous attack on novels by a contributor (who signed himself "A. A."),¹⁴³ this enthusiastic boy exclaims: "The man who rises unaffected and unimproved from the picture of the fidelity, simplicity, and virtue of Joseph Andrews and his Fanny, and the parental

¹⁴⁰ *The London Review*, I, 31 (February, 1809).

¹⁴¹ Pierce Egan's *Life in London*, London, 1821, Invocation.

¹⁴² *Poems* of T. L. Beddoes, London, 1851, I, cxxxii (letter from C. D. Bevan, July 26, 1851).

¹⁴³ Was it Archibald Alison?

solicitude of Parson Adams, must possess a head and a heart of stone." The storm of protest among the readers of *The Christian Observer* was so great, writes Trevelyan, that one of the "scandalized contributors" informed "the public that he had committed the obnoxious number to the flames, and should thenceforward cease to take in the magazine."¹⁴⁴ To use the words of Professor Cross, "Before the tempest could be stilled, Zachary Macaulay had to explain that the article, as abhorrent to himself as to his readers, was sent in by an anonymous contributor and inadvertently printed. Tom confessed to the subterfuge, but could not be brought to alter his opinion of Fielding, praise of whom had more than all else raised the storm which threatened to overwhelm his father's periodical."¹⁴⁵ Of Macaulay we shall have more to say farther on: Richardsonian as he was, he was not one to disparage Fielding; his early admiration for the novelist never deserted him. "There was no society in London so agreeable," according to Trevelyan, "that Macaulay would have preferred it at breakfast or at dinner to the company of Sterne, or Fielding, or Horace Walpole, or Boswell."¹⁴⁶

Young Beddoes and young Macaulay were not alone in their admiration for Fielding; according to a vociferous denunciation of "romances of every description," which forms a part of William Cobbett's *Advice to Young Men*, Fielding's masterpiece was the arch-offender not only in viciousness but in popularity. Every girl "addicted to the reading of novels sighs to be a SOPHIA WESTERN," he complains, and "every boy a TOM JONES." "What girl," he asks, "is not in love with that *wild* youth, and what boy does not find a justification for his *wildness*? What can be more pernicious than the teachings of this celebrated romance? Here are two young men put before us, both sons of the same mother; the

¹⁴⁴ Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Macaulay*, New York, 1876, I, 68. For Macaulay's article see *The Christian Observer*, XV (1816), 785.

¹⁴⁵ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 175.

¹⁴⁶ Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Macaulay*, II, 394.

one a *bastard* (and by a parson too), the other a *legitimate child*; the former wild, disobedient, and squandering; the latter steady, sober, obedient, and frugal; the former everything that is frank and generous in his nature, the latter a greedy hypocrite; the former rewarded with the most beautiful and virtuous of women and a double estate, the latter punished by being made an outcast. How is it possible for young people to read such a book, and to look upon orderliness, sobriety, obedience, and frugality, as *virtues*?"¹⁴⁷

Less rabid than Cobbett was young Richard Whately, the future archbishop. "Fielding's novels . . ." he writes (in his well-known defense of Jane Austen, 1821),¹⁴⁸ "display great knowledge of mankind; the characters are well preserved; the persons introduced all act as one would naturally expect they should, in the circumstances in which they are placed; but these circumstances are such as it is incalculably improbable should ever exist: several of the events, taken singly, are much against the chances of probability; but the combination of the whole in a connected series, is next to impossible. Even the romances which admit a mixture of supernatural agency, are not more unfit to prepare men for real life, than such novels as these; since one might just as reasonably calculate on the intervention of a fairy [Was Whately thinking of Lady Mary's criticism?], as on the train of lucky chances which combine first to involve Tom Jones in his difficulties, and afterwards to extricate him." Whately suggests that perhaps "the supernatural fable is of the two not only . . . the less mischievous in its moral effects, but also the more correct kind of composition in point of taste." The last statement here is worth observing: that the "supernatural fable"; *i.e.*, romance, is "more correct" in point of "taste" than realism—unless, indeed, that realism should be of the quiet, vicarage type. In one

¹⁴⁷ Cobbett, W., *Advice to Young Men*, London, 1829, paragraph 311.

¹⁴⁸ Whately, R., *Miscellaneous Lectures and Reviews*, London, 1861. This review appeared in the *Quarterly*, January, 1821, XXIV, 356.

of his private letters, Whately acknowledges that he has "always defended" the *Waverley Novels*.¹⁴⁹

Cobbett had complained that *Tom Jones* was popular, and Whately had inferred it; but another disparager of Fielding, the novelist Miss Ferrier, testified to the contrary, though she admitted the great vogue of the book in the past. Oddly enough, considering her own predilection for rather broad humor, she makes one of her characters attack Fielding's books as pernicious; and, as Professor Saintsbury has pointed out, "Not only the context, but many other passages, prove that this was her own opinion."¹⁵⁰ The remark in question occurs in *The Inheritance* (1824), in which, during the course of a jeremiad against "licentious" fiction, the novels of Fielding and Smollett were described as "noxious exhalations" that were already "passing away." Nevertheless, in her *Marriage* (1818), six years before, two huge cats which are intended to create considerable laughter (by their inopportune presence in a lady's bed-chamber) are named respectively "Gil Blas" and "Tom Jones."¹⁵¹ Miss Ferrier's attack was, of course, by no means uncommon. In that forgotten book *The Authoress*, a character called Fanny defends her passion for sentimental trash by asking, "Have I not seen my father read, and with great pleasure, the works of Fielding, Smollett, and such kind of authors?"¹⁵² But even that lover of Richardson, Miss Mitford, acknowledged Fielding's excellence when she said that Walter Scott brought his characters before our eyes "like the portraits of Fielding and Cervantes."¹⁵³

As will presently be seen, the passage in Miss Ferrier's novel

¹⁴⁹ *Life . . . of Richard Whately*, by E. J. Whately, London, 1866, I, 37.

¹⁵⁰ *The Inheritance*, Edinburgh, 1824, II, 116-118; also Saintsbury's *The Peace of the Augustans*, London, 1916, p. 114 note.

¹⁵¹ Miss Ferrier's *Marriage*, ch. xv.

¹⁵² *The Authoress*, by the "author of 'Rachel,'" London, 1819, p. 111.

¹⁵³ See her letter to Sir William Elford, October 31, 1814.—A. G. K. L'Estrange, *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford*, New York, 1870, I, 225.

was prophetic of the change that was already in the air; for the time being, however, the fictional miasma of which her clergyman complained was not vanishing so fast as he would have us believe. Charles Butler, the eminent English jurist who completed the edition of Coke upon Littelton, declared in his *Reminiscences* (1822) that "the Amelia of Fielding" was "the perfection of female excellence";¹⁵⁴ and John Hookham Frere, the diplomatist and translator, was still sure enough of a Fielding audience to use the following analogy:

Our fancies figure a Divinity,
Like Fielding's squire, a Mr. Alworthy:
Easy, benignant, equitable, kind—
A sort of patron, suited to our mind;
(A kind of character we should revere
For an estated neighbour or a peer).¹⁵⁵

William Gifford, savagely attacking in the *Quarterly* (for January, 1818) Hazlitt's "Character" of "Hamlet," makes use of a reference to Partridge¹⁵⁶ at the play; and in a speech at the House of Commons (March 2, 1819), Sir James Mackintosh, devoted as he was to Richardson, referred to Fielding as a "man deeply skilled in human nature."¹⁵⁷ During the following year, "Ephraim Hardcastle" (W. H. Pyne) sprinkled his *Wine and Walnuts*¹⁵⁸ (1820-1821) with references to Fielding, who, by the way, is made to appear in person, conversing with Roubiliac, taking off the vacuity of a man of wealth, etc. Worthless as this hodgepodge is, it undoubtedly reflects the interest that was taken at this time in the novelist

¹⁵⁴ Charles Butler's *Reminiscences*, fourth ed., London, 1824, p. 307. The date of the dedication is February 28, 1822.

¹⁵⁵ *The Works of John Hookham Frere*, edited by W. E. and Sir Bartle Frere, London, 1872, I, 319.

¹⁵⁶ *The Quarterly Review*, XVIII, 461.

¹⁵⁷ *The Miscellaneous Works of . . . Mackintosh*, London, 1846, III, 381.

¹⁵⁸ *Wine and Walnuts*, second ed., London, 1824, I, 73, 74, 78, 82-97, 108, 109, 119, 125-127, 230, 233, 271, 272; II, 68, 156, 273. Previously appeared in parts in *The Literary Gazette*, 1820-1821.

Henry Fielding; for Pyne was a good judge of the popular taste. So also, across the Channel, was Édouard Mennechet, whose one-act comedy, "Fielding," was produced at the Théâtre Français on January 8, 1823.¹⁵⁹ The status of the author of *Tom Jones* may be seen again in the attitude of young Thomas Carlyle, who had not as yet attained any great reputation. As we shall observe later, Fielding was never a favorite with Carlyle; but in the early days, *Tom Jones* (to use the words of a recent writer) "seems to have stood to him as the highest type of what he calls 'our common English notion of the Novel.'"¹⁶⁰ *Wilhelm Meister*, he thinks, "has less relation to Fielding's *Tom Jones* than to Spenser's *Faëry Queen*";¹⁶¹ and the field of the novel he says (in his preface to *German Romance*, 1827), is a "free arena" for all "sorts and degrees of talent," and may be "worked in equally by a Henry Fielding and a Doctor Polydore."¹⁶²

In the celebrated "Noctes Ambrosianae," to which Maginn contributed, not so many references to Fielding occur as might be expected; and none of the allusions that follow are from those "Noctes" which, according to Professor Ferrier, were entirely written by Wilson. But William Maginn, one of the chief contributors to the series, was a confessed admirer of Fielding, who, to his mind, was the greatest master of plot of all the "first-rate novelists."¹⁶³ Here are several interesting passages taken from numbers for which Wilson was not solely responsible. In May, 1822, North is made to ask, "Is it possible that you have need for ME to tell you all the old stories about . . . Fielding? How he kept the Thames on fire with his farces and novels, and roasted all his brother justices to cinders?" To which Tickler answers, "Why, you know, all

¹⁵⁹ "Fielding, Comédie en un Acte et en Vers," Paris, 1823.

¹⁶⁰ Roe, F. W., *Thomas Carlyle as a Critic of Literature*, New York, 1910, p. 87.

¹⁶¹ Carlyle's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, London (Chapman and Hall), 1869, I, 272.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, I, 312.

¹⁶³ Maginn's *Miscellanies*, London, 1885, I, 190.

the old novelists dealt in nothing but personalities."¹⁶⁴ In March, 1823, a scene in a book that is being discussed is characterized as "worse than Sophy Western and Mrs. Honour about Tom Jones's broken arm."¹⁶⁵ In June, 1824, Tickler asks, "Who the devil has ever even heard the name of the five-hundredth part of the trashy productions which flowed from the pens of Fielding and Smollett . . . The plays of the Justice . . . are all pretty well forgotten, I suppose; and what signifies this to the Student of . . . Commodore Trunnion, or Parson Trulliber?"¹⁶⁶ In August, 1831, and in October, 1832, there are also references to Parson Trulliber, interest in whom had been revived by the recent illustrations of Cruikshank.¹⁶⁷ The following bit of dialogue, however (July, 1834), which indicates a certain amount of respect for Fielding's position as a novelist, *was* by Wilson. Tickler and the Shepherd are discussing Marryat's Peter Simple:

SHEPHERD. Peter Simple in his ain way's as gude's Parson Adams.
TICKLER. Parson Adams!

SHEPHERD. Aye, just Parson Adams. He [Marryat] that imagined Peter Simple's a "Sea-Fieldin."¹⁶⁸

In the "Noctes" for September, 1831, "Christopher North" is made to say that "Even Clarissa Harlowe has sunk under the weight of her eight volumes";¹⁶⁹ but no such assertion did that literary arbiter ever make in regard to *Tom Jones*.

The state of affairs had changed very greatly since 1797—when *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* subordinated Fielding to Richardson—as a glance at the reference books of this period will show. Though some of the accounts¹⁷⁰ of Fielding are too

¹⁶⁴ *Blackwood's Magazine*, XI, 613, No. III of the "Noctes."

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 373 (No. VII).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 711 (No. XV).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XXX, 403 (No. LVII); and XXXII, 718 (No. LXIII).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 123 (No. LXVI).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XXX, 533 (No. LVIII).

¹⁷⁰ For example, Abraham Rees's *The Cyclopaedia*, Vol. XIV, "Fielding."

often defaced by the slurs of Aikin, Watson, and other calumniators, we frequently come upon such passages as the following. In *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1816) by J. Norris Brewer, the "inimitable author of *Tom Jones*" is characterized as "the Cervantes of England." Quoting the splendid opening of the *Voyage to Lisbon*—a passage which was to be started on a more prosperous career by Walter Scott's inclusion of it in his biographical sketch of the novelist not long afterwards—the compiler pays a just tribute to that "fortitude" which the stricken Fielding displayed "during the last mournful year of his life."¹⁷¹ Ten years later the Rev. Richard Warner, in his *History of the Abbey of Glastonbury* could characterize Fielding—even in the midst of the vogue of Scott—as "a writer, whose keen but playful wit; penetrating insight into human nature; quick perception, and accurate delineation of characteristic manners; happy invention of incident; and lively mode of narrative, have placed him at the head of English novelists."¹⁷²

From what has been said in this chapter it is apparent that Richardson was aging much faster than Fielding, who, even by the unenthusiastic, was usually admitted to be superior as a constructive artist. In 1829 "Christopher North" himself went so far as to speak of "that good old proser Richardson," as "a sort of idiot, who had a strange insight into some parts of human nature, and a tolerable acquaintance with most parts of speech." Richardson, he says, "set the public a-reading, and Fielding and Smollett shoved her on."¹⁷³ As we look back over this period and consider the attitude of Coleridge, Scott, Byron, and Leigh Hunt toward Richardson and toward Fielding

¹⁷¹ J. Norris Brewer's "Middlesex," in *The Beauties of England and Wales*, London, 1816, X (Part IV), 339, 424.

¹⁷² Warner, R., *An History of the Abbey of . . . Glastonbury*, Bath, 1826, p. lxx.

¹⁷³ *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, by "Christopher North," Philadelphia, I, 74. For the retort to Wordsworth, see I, 227.

we cannot help observing the change that, by 1830, had come about in the relative positions of the two writers. Richardson, it is true, held a far higher place than we accord him now, but his work was growing antiquated, the modern novel—more concise, swift-running, humorous, natural—was definitely commuted, after the success of *W. Mervin*, to the form (if not the substance) of his great contemporary.

Moreover, during this period, the formal prose style of Richardson, concerning which there had always been more or less adverse comment, was held in less esteem than ever before, while that of Fielding was somewhat more highly regarded. In the age of Lamb and Hunt the old standards of formality and elegance were being abandoned. Hazlitt was the only one of the great critics of the time who attacked Fielding as a stylist. Increased attention to Fielding's essays helped to bring about a safer view than that of Godwin, Anderson, and others. In the preface to his *British Essayists* Chalmers had written, "FIELDING's style is original, and his humour (different from that of ADDISON, yet excellent in its kind) is so copious as to extend over his voluminous writings with undiminished force. He has had no successful imitators."¹⁷⁴ And John Stuart Mill, as we learn from his *Autobiography*, endeavored—"about the end of 1812, or the beginning of 1815"—to improve his own style by the "assiduous reading" of Fielding, who, he says, combines "in a remarkable degree ease with force."¹⁷⁵

Wisdom, too, was now more frequently attributed to Fielding. To the testimony of Coleridge and others should be added that of T. L. Peacock, who, in his "Essay on Fashionable Literature," insists that to be lasting a novel must contain essential wisdom, for "mere amusement" will "certainly not pass to posterity." Scott he commends for having given "great and valuable information" concerning the manners of the past; but the writers who have, in his phrase, "led fancy against

¹⁷⁴ Chalmers's *British Essayists*, London, 1801, VI. xxxv.

¹⁷⁵ *Autobiography*, New York, 1872, p. 117.

opinion with a success that no other names can parallel" are "Cervantes, Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, [and] Fielding."¹⁷⁶

And a third item in the higher appreciation of Fielding during this period was, as we have seen, a recognition on the part of a few notable writers of the novelist's democratic spirit. Byron's excellent comment has already been given; Coleridge regarded Fielding as a "lover of liberty"; so too, we may infer, did Southey, who transcribed approvingly Brooke's comment to the effect that Richardson "always gives the full value to title and fortune";¹⁷⁷ while Hunt jubilantly apostrophized Fielding as "Thou, whom the great Richardson, less in that matter (and some others) than thyself, did accuse of vulgarity, because thou didst discern natural gentility in a footman, and yet wast not to be taken in by the airs of Pamela and my Lady G."¹⁷⁸

Thus Fielding's style, wisdom, and democratic spirit—as well as his plot-shaping, character-building, and general verisimilitude—were affectionately dwelt upon during the very years when the "Scotch Novels" were still a literary phenomenon. The *obiter dicta* of Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, Southey, Hunt, Byron, and of others noted in this chapter became, as time went on, golden phrases in Fielding's book of fame. And yet surprisingly little was written about him by any one of them; not a single *entire* essay by any critic of note (mentioned in this chapter), except Scott, seems to have been produced. Worse still, outside of the great group of critics, Fielding was frequently thought to be, if not an immoral writer, at least an inelegant one; and the *genre* of realism—in the opinion of Jeffrey, Lockhart, and Wilson—was inferior to that of romantic idealism. Though the reputation of Richardson was more irreparably damaged than Fielding's by the

¹⁷⁶ Van Doren, C., *The Life of Thomas Love Peacock*, London, 1911, pp. 135-136.

¹⁷⁷ Southey's *Common-Place Book*, edited by Warter, fourth series, London, 1851, p. 313. Brooke's comment is in *Juliet Grenville*.

¹⁷⁸ *The Companion*, London, 1828, p. 158 (No. XII, March 26, 1828).

popularity of Scott, the author of *Tom Jones* was by the beginning of the third decade already experiencing that "falling off" to which Hazlitt referred in 1829. It was commonly made a matter of rejoicing that Scott had not only enlarged the scope of prose fiction but that he had refined its subject-matter. "Scott's greatest glory . . .," wrote the historian Prescott, in 1832, "arises from the superior dignity to which he has raised the novel, not by its historic, but its moral character, so that, instead of being obliged, as with Fielding's and Smollett's, to devour it, like Sancho Panza's cheese-cakes, in a corner as it were, it is now made to furnish a pure and delectable repast for all the members of the assembled family."¹⁷⁹ And when we call to mind the increasing audience of women, the rapidly expanding number of country readers, and the movement toward outward refinement which had spread over the manners of England by 1830, we cannot gainsay the truth of Prescott's statement. In the opinion of the greater critics, however, along with the increasing refinement of manners there was developing what Hazlitt called, as we have quoted the passage, a "senseless fastidiousness . . . more owing to an affectation of gentility than to a disgust of vice."¹⁸⁰ "You are asked if you like Fielding," he writes (in 1828), "as if it were a statuteable offence."¹⁸¹ To Coleridge, as to Hazlitt, this growing affectation was nothing less than "cant"; and so it was, likewise, to Charles Lamb, who in 1829 exclaimed in a letter to Barry Cornwall—with as much seriousness as humor—"Oh B. C.! my whole heart is faint, and my whole head sick . . . at this damn'd canting unmasculine age!"¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Prescott, W. H., in *The North American Review*, XXXV, 188-189 (July, 1832).

¹⁸⁰ Waller and Glover *Hazlitt*, XII, 374.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, XI, 374.

¹⁸² *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, edited by Ainger, London and New York, 1888, II, 219. In the opinion of Canon Ainger, Lamb "might have foreseen certain aesthetic developments of seventy years later when he warned men, in his Essay on Hogarth, against 'that disgust at common life . . . which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms

The fact that in 1830 (after so many years!) a marble sarcophagus with eloquent Latin inscriptions was erected in the cemetery of *Os Cypristes* testifies to the widening recognition and excellent praise of Fielding which have been recorded in this chapter; but the British parson's inability (in view of the stories, old and new) to refrain from saying in the marble, "*Non quin ipse subinde irretiretur evitandis*" ("not but that he was sometimes caught in the net which folly spreads"¹⁸³)—was an ominous forecast of the trouble in store for the novelist in the decades to follow.

Our final impression of the period 1814-1832, however, should not be that of the "falling-off" in Fielding's reading public. Rather we should think of the delight which the great masters experienced in the Father of the English Novel: of Leigh Hunt's "deathless generations"; of Hazlitt's "spirit of obligation" to one whose name had "thrown a light upon humanity"; of Charles Lamb's "cordial, hearty laugh," and the "thousand thumbs" that had turned the leaves of *Tom Jones*; and of Coleridge's "How charming, how wholesome Fielding always is!" Not for many a day was there again generally experienced in literary circles such joy in Fielding as when Leigh Hunt exclaimed, "Oh, to wear out one of the celestial lives of a triple century's duration, and exquisitely to grow old, in reciprocating dinners . . . with the immortals of old books! Will Fielding 'leave his card' in the next world? . . . and Walter Scott (for he will be there to . . .)!"¹⁸⁴

and beauties is in danger of producing.'"—Ainger's Introduction to *Poems Plays and Miscellaneous Essays of Charles Lamb*, New York, 1885, p. xii.

¹⁸³ For a full account of the inscription, see Cross's *Fielding*, III, 68-70.

¹⁸⁴ *The Companion*, No. XIII, pp. 161-164 (April 2, 1828).

CHAPTER XIII

The Victorian Age

PART I

Before Thackeray's "Humourists"

1832-1851

BY 1835, Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, Scott, and Byron had passed away, and other men, other manners, were coming to the fore in English literature. As we turn to the new generation—of Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman, Tennyson, Browning, Fitzgerald, Dickens, Thackeray, Lytton, and Charlotte Brontë—we feel very keenly that change in atmosphere which was heralded by the British chaplain. In the first place, the commendable desire for greater outward refinement, which had been gathering strength ever since the end of the eighteenth century, was now passing over into that “senseless fastidiousness,” that “affectation of gentility” of which Hazlitt, Lamb, and Coleridge complained. Moreover, largely owing to the vogue of Scott, the new standard of excellence, which demanded an idealistic rendering rather than a realistic one, was exceedingly popular and persistent. And, finally, the successive splendid triumphs of Dickens, of Thackeray, and (somewhat later) of George Eliot, so engaged the minds and hearts of the reading public that *all* the eighteenth-century novelists (save, perhaps, Goldsmith) ceased by degrees to be generally read except by those inclined to literature. In consequence, the reputation of Henry Fielding as a Novelist during the entire Victorian Age was not what it had been in the forepart of the century. Not of course that praise of him suddenly ceased; for excellent criticisms, here and there, are scattered through the books and periodicals of these decades, particularly *dicta* by the writers of fiction, among whom was Fielding’s greatest disciple, Thackeray. But as a rule the celebrated literary men of the Victorian Age did not regard his works as did

their famous predecessors: Tennyson, Browning, Fitzgerald, Rossetti, and Morris, for example, had no such opinion of them as had Coleridge, Scott, and Byron; Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater did not value the novelist as Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Southey valued him. Nor was this indifference or actual disparagement confined to Fielding. In their enthusiasm for what was considered a vastly superior refinement as well as for what were regarded as the "sublimities," men of letters were too prone to look down upon the eighteenth century as a period unfortunately uninspired. Notable exceptions (which will be spoken of later) only prove the rule. For such leaders of thought as Carlyle and Ruskin to dismiss the entire eighteenth century as an age of "simulacra" and to deny to Fielding in particular the possession of imagination, a lack of perspective existed, which, sooner or later, demanded correction at the hands of more careful if less rhapsodical investigators.

It was during the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century that the reaction began to be distinctly palpable. Due to the efforts of the critics of a generation that is only now passing away—of such men, say, as Dobson, Henley, Gosse, and Saintsbury—Fielding's reputation as Man and Author, released somewhat from Victorian misinterpretation, took, before the century was out, a great turn for the better. The business of the chapters which immediately follow will be to record in detail the views that were held by literary persons, notable and otherwise, during the Victorian Age, and to account for the various influences which affected the assessment of Fielding's genius. Inasmuch as the most potent of all such influences during the period as a whole was Thackeray's lecture on Fielding, in 1851, the present chapter may well be devoted to the state of opinion before its publication.

Scott, as has been said, was felt to have refined the subject-matter of fiction and to have enlarged its scope. And though both these operations—of immense value to English fiction—were in themselves deserving of the highest praise, some of their by-products, expressed as critical standards, were not so

commendable. Constantly we shall find critics in this period assuming either the moral standard that realism is less *refined* than romance, or the artistic standard that realism is less *imaginative* (and therefore of a lower *genre*) than romance. Ethically and aesthetically, therefore, Fielding, when weighed in the critical balance, was often found wanting. The reason that romance was considered to imply higher imaginative powers than realism lay, at bottom, in the confusion of an author's subject with his treatment of it. The 'Thirties and the 'Forties, were "the days," as Edward Garnett justly observes, "when critics still talked learnedly of the 'noble style' . . . of 'sinking' or 'rising' with 'the subject,' the days when Books of Beauty were in fashion, and Rembrandt's choice of beggars, wrinkled faces and grey hairs, for his favourite subjects seemed a low and reprehensible taste in 'high art.'"¹ The reason that romance was considered ethically more refined than realism lay in a similar confusion of character with conduct; it was, in fact, another avatar of that confusion which Fielding spent most of his life trying to disentangle. In other words, the commendable refinement of manners we have been tracing had now rounded the circle and was passing over into that affectation and formality, that exaltation of the conventional over the moral which, in the middle of the century, drew upon itself the castigation of Charlotte Brontë and the ridicule of Thackeray. To these two varieties of confusion there was added a third, which, closely allied to the other two, and, indeed, including them, was more potent than either in the depreciation of Fielding's genius. This was the incessant confounding of the ethical and the artistic. Its logical outcome was that predilection for the *argumentum ad hominem* which was to vitiate the just appreciation of Fielding as a novelist during the entire Victorian Age. In the period we are now investigating we shall find that the notion of what Fielding was as an artist and the notion of what Fielding was thought to be as a man constantly interacted upon each other to the detriment of both.

¹ Edward Garnett's preface to the "Everyman's" edition of Defoe's *Captain Singleton*, London, *n.d.*, p. viii.

With Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, Hunt, Byron, and Southey there was no such vicious confusion; but with the critics of the new age of refinement the terms "sad scamp" and "sorry scoundrel" became increasingly more common. The movement culminates, as far as the present chapter is concerned, with Thackeray's apology in his *Humourists* (1851): "I cannot offer or hope," he says, "to make a hero of Harry Fielding."

Does the writer possess *imagination*? Is his picture of life *genteel*? Did he lead a *refined* life? These were the questions most frequently asked in the 'Thirties and the 'Forties. As applied to Fielding, the answer to the first question, during the early part of this period, most frequently involved a comparison between his works and those of Walter Scott. "Fielding and Smollett," wrote O. W. B. Peabody in *The North American Review* of April, 1833, "were great in their own sphere, but that sphere assuredly was not high . . . neither of them had the least conception of poetical romance."² This was undoubtedly the popular attitude. Before the end of this chapter we shall see that the reviewers kept an eye on Fielding and frequently used him as a touchstone upon which to try—not always to their benefit—the passing fashions in current fiction; in comparison with the author of *Waverley*, however, the author of *Tom Jones* was quite generally considered to possess less "elevation of soul." In fact these were the very words used by the well-known American critic, E. P. Whipple, in addressing a Boston audience during the winter of 1844. Fielding, he says, "might have taken the highest rank among great constructive and creative minds; but he had no elevation of soul, and little power of depicting it in imagination."³ "Who has not heard of those unmatched authors Fielding, and Smollett, and Goldsmith . . .?" triumphantly asks a *Westminster* reviewer (January, 1834), implying that

² *The North American Review*, XXXVI, 307. See also *The Edinburgh Literary Journal*, August 29, 1829.

³ Whipple's *Literature and Life*, Boston and New York, 1888, p. 46. The address ("Novels and Novelists. Charles Dickens") was given in December, 1844.

Scott has surpassed them. "That any future novel-writer will equally obscure the splendours of Scott" is, he predicts, though "not impossible," at least "most improbable."⁴

This dislike of realism, at least of Fielding's brand of realism, accounts, no doubt, for the aversion of Poe, who found in Dickens a rendering of life sufficiently fantastic to suit his penchant for the romantic. "For one Fouqué there are fifty Molières," he declared, "for one Dickens" there are "five million . . . Fieldings"⁵—an extravagance to which Professor Saintsbury appositely retorts, "Perhaps five million marks of exclamation might not inadequately meet the case."⁶ Hawthorne, it is to be observed, was more catholic in his tastes. In his "Hall of Fantasy," where stood the statues of men who "have been rulers and demigods in the realms of imagination . . . Fielding, Richardson, and Scott occupied conspicuous pedestals."⁷ Like Scott before, and Stevenson after him, Poe held a brief for romance; and in each instance the critical balance was thereby disturbed. Scott (aided by his patriotism and against his better judgment) disparaged Fielding as a man and tried to place Smollett on the same shelf with him as a fiction-writer; Stevenson denounced *Tom Jones* as "dirty, dull, and false";⁸ Poe, more rabid than his brother romancers, rejected the novelist utterly.

Not only was there in the 'Forties a growing belief that romance belonged to a higher category than realistic novels, but the romances of Scott in particular were commonly thought to be exceptionally conducive to the elevation of morals. "The Historical Romance," wrote Archibald Alison, in his review of fiction (1845)⁹ "should take its place" as a puri-

⁴ *The Westminster Review*, XX, 153.

⁵ *Graham's Magazine*, XX, 187 (March, 1842).

⁶ *A History of Criticism*, New York, 1904, III, 634.

⁷ "The Hall of Fantasy" originally appeared in *The Pioneer*, February, 1843; see *Complete Works*, Boston and New York, 1909, II, 196.

⁸ *Scribner's Magazine*, III, 766 (June, 1888).

⁹ Archibald Alison's "The Historical Romance," in *Essays*, Edinburgh and London, 1850; see *Blackwood's*, September, 1845.

fying and elevating agency with "the plays of Shakespeare." The "long-continued popularity" of Fielding's novels is due, he says, to their fidelity to life; but he is careful to add "low life." And J. H. Newman,¹⁰ who ignored Fielding, constantly declared that Scott, by enriching the imagination of men with ideal pictures of the past, was the great ally of religion and virtue. In that once highly esteemed work by Henry Hallam, *The Literature of Europe*, which appeared toward the end of the 'Thirties, Scott was already disputing the palm with Cervantes, while Fielding was greatly subordinated to both. Though, writes Hallam, "we should hardly think" Scott the equal of Cervantes in "comic romance," he excels him in "variety" of "power"; but "we have only to compare" the author of *Don Quixote* with Fielding "to judge of his vast superiority."¹¹ In the 'Forties, as Frederic Harrison truly says, Scott enjoyed a veritable "Shakespearean dominion."¹²

Against the tendency to compare Fielding unfavorably with Scott, there were, to be sure, occasional dissenting voices. "I can only believe, when I read Fielding," declared Macready, February 26, 1837, "that persons speak in utter ignorance of his wit, humour, profound thought, satire, and truth of character when they set Scott above him, or even compare the two writers."¹³ Some years before, he had recorded in his diary¹⁴ (July 19, 1834), "While waiting for Calcraft, took up Fielding's *Amelia*, and was pleased with much of the story, but more with the happy maxims and excellent counsel with which

¹⁰ *Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics*, Boston, 1891, p. 14; see also W. Ward's *Life of John Henry Newman*, London, 1912, II, 355.

¹¹ Henry Hallam's *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, fourth ed., London, 1854, III, 160. Fielding *does* share with Scott, however, the honor of being "the best" of the great Spaniard's "successors."

¹² Harrison, Frederic, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, London, 1911, I, 23.

¹³ *Macready's Reminiscences*, edited by F. Pollock, New York, 1875, p. 410.

¹⁴ *The Diaries of . . . Macready*, New York, 1912, I, 166, 177; II, 256.

it abounds." On September 5, 1834, we find him reading "some chapters of *Tom Jones*"; and on January 28, 1844, while traveling in America, "Fielding's pleasant *Joseph Andrews*" was his "inside companion." Despite admirers like Macready, however, the feeling that the works of Scott belonged to a higher *genre* than those of Fielding was very common for a long while to come.

Perhaps the best statement of the less praiseworthy results which followed the perusal of romantic novels was voiced by George Borrow. In his judgment the reading of such fiction did not bring about at all that "elevation of soul" which Newman desired, especially among the middle classes. "Their chief characteristic," said Borrow's Man in Black, "is a rage for grandeur and gentility. . . . Everything that's lofty meets their unqualified approbation; whilst everything humble, or, as they call it, 'low,' is scouted by them. They begin to have a vague idea that the religion which they have hitherto professed is low; at any rate that it is not the religion of the mighty ones of the earth . . . nor was used by the grand personages of whom they have read in their novels and romances, their Ivanhoes, their Marmions, and their Ladies of the Lake."

"Do you think that the writings of Scott have had any influence in modifying their religious opinions?"

"Most certainly I do," said the Man in Black. "The writings of that man have made them greater fools than they were before. All their conversation now is about gallant knights, princesses, and cavaliers, with which his pages are stuffed—all of whom were Papists, or very High Church, which is nearly the same thing."¹⁵ Though this passage has been objected to as anti-Catholic propaganda, its general truth as a picture of the affectation of gentility into which the refinement of manners was passing can hardly be denied.

A notion of the esteem in which Borrow held Scott's great predecessor may be inferred from his assertion that though the Jews "may have Rambams in plenty," they have "never a

¹⁵ Borrow's *Lavengro*, ch. xciv.

Fielding nor a Shakespeare."¹⁶ He especially admired *Amelia* and tells us that when he was in Lisbon he kissed the "cold tomb" of its author, "the most singular genius" which England had "ever produced." To Borrow the growing neglect and disparagement of Fielding seemed exceedingly unjust; he lamented (1843) the fact that it had "long been the fashion" to "abuse" the novels "in public" while reading them "in secret."¹⁷

We need not turn over many books of the day in order to find examples of the abuse of which Borrow complains. One "characteristic specimen" of this "cant and illiberality"—which was pointed out by Lawrence¹⁸ in 1855—is a passage in the *Memoirs of Lyttelton*, by the Rev. Robert Phillimore. "Tom Jones," says this clergyman, is "now" (1845) "often unread by men, and scarcely ever read by women; though its merits have saved it from the oblivion to which unredeemed indecency has consigned *Amelia*."¹⁹ Phillimore professed to be shocked by Fielding's works; but, like many another, he was mainly influenced by the stories regarding Fielding's life. The old scandalous anecdotes about the novelist's "dissolute" career (augmented by the exertions of Aikin, Mrs. Barbauld, Watson, and Scott) were now increasingly emphasized; and what he was thought to be as a man colored more and more the popular notion of him as a writer. Besides, not long before Phillimore's *Lyttelton* appeared, additional gossip concerning Fielding's life had been furnished by Lady Mary's granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, in an introductory memoir to Lord Wharnccliffe's edition of the Montagu *Letters* (1837).

In justice to Lady Stuart it must be admitted that she sincerely admired Fielding's great novel. "Mrs. S.[cott] and I," she wrote (August 3, 1831), "have been quite alone these . . . days, and are not at all tired of one another, nor of a

¹⁶ *Lavengro*, ch. xxvi.

¹⁷ *The Bible in Spain*, fourth ed., London, 1843, I, 8 (ch. i).

¹⁸ F. Lawrence's *Life of Fielding*, London, 1855, p. 259 note.

¹⁹ Phillimore, Robert, *Memoirs . . . of . . . Lyttelton*, London, 1845, I, 342.

wicked book we have been reading (TOM JONES if you won't tell). Neither of us had read it for a great while, and, oh, what good reading it is! No modern *stuff* can possibly do after it." Ten years before (March 23, 1821), she had said of a certain occurrence that it was "a scene worthy of Fielding," and had added that no "one living author" could "do it justice." Again (August, 1831), she refers to *Tom Jones* as a book in which "every word tells and my famous talent for skipping can have no employment." And during the following year (January, 1832), she thus contrasts the "morality" of *Tom Jones* with that of Mme. Roland's *Memoirs*, a book which young ladies who "would not have been allowed to open *Tom Jones*" were "taught to read and admire." "Fielding," she writes, "certainly" does describe "*l'amour physique* between Tom and Molly Seagrim, but I daresay would as soon have given Sophia an inclination to commit murder as hinted that she ever had Madame Roland's *sensations*, or even that Tom had them towards her. *Their* passion he studied to refine and ennoble."²⁰

Now all this is excellent enough; but when, a few years later, this granddaughter of Lady Mary appeared in print she found it impossible to keep from embroidering upon the family tradition regarding the novelist's poverty and improvidence. Therefore she wrote of the Fielding *ménage*: They "led no happy life, for they were almost always miserably poor, and seldom in a state of quiet and safety. All the world knows what was his imprudence; if ever he possessed a score of pounds, nothing could keep him from lavishing it idly, or make him think of to-morrow. Sometimes they were living in decent lodgings with tolerable comfort; sometimes in a wretched garret without necessities; not to speak of the spunging-houses and hiding-places where he was occasionally to be found."²¹ What a picture! It need only be said that mod-

²⁰ *Letters of Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton*, edited by J. A. Home, Edinburgh, first series, 1901; second series, 1903; [II] 289; [I] 140; [II] 293, 327.

²¹ *Letters*, London, n.d. [1861], I, 106.

ern investigation²² fails to support the notion of so dire an indigence.

Long before Lady Stuart composed this sketch, the practice of drawing lurid pictures of Fielding the Profligate had virtually become an established custom. As Scott and Dickens and Thackeray successively absorbed the attention of the readers of the day and as *Tom Jones* became a book for the few rather than the many, its author, even of old a legendary figure, was now to the fastidious Early Victorians a favorite subject for literary moralists and graphic paragraphers. Space forbids a detailed account of the various exercises of fancy which appeared during the twenty years before Thackeray's *Humourists*; but the following examples may be considered as typical. To add a vivid touch to his *Life and Genius* of Samuel Foote, "Jon Bee" (John Badcock) built out a far-fetched parallel between the career of the dramatist and that of the novelist. Following Murphy's story, Badcock speaks of that "silly extravagance" of setting up "a carriage, with its attendant equipage," which, he alleges, brought ruin upon both Fielding and Foote. "Both Foote and Fielding," he continues, "pursued the law until the law pursued them, and gave it up for the drama." Finally, to make sure that his readers have got the point of it all, he says, both "were free livers—libertines—men of the world—*des bons vivans*."²³ Any comment upon a comparison between Fielding and Foote would be superfluous. Another writer, assuming that there was plenty of liquor in the university town of Leyden and assuming also that Fielding was as debauched a character as previous writers had made him out, announces the interesting discovery that in that very town he commenced his "course of deep dissipation." A further discovery he makes is that, "notwithstanding the bitterness" with which Fielding "has satirized that vice in others, he sometimes made talent worship rank, and was compelled to barter his natural independence for . . . 'victuals.'" And then, having

²² Cross's *Fielding*, III, 270-273.

²³ "An Essay, on the Life and Genius" of Samuel Foote, in *Works*, London, 1830, I, lxxxiii-lxxxiv (Preface dated January 30, 1830).

brought the author to the depths of despicableness, he says of his books that *Jonathan Wild* is a "tissue of blackguardisms," that *Joseph Andrews* verges on "tiresomeness," that in *Amelia* it "is easy to perceive" a "decaying mind," and that in his heroines he has degraded the "female character." All this constituted a part of the *Lives of Eminent and Illustrious Englishmen* by George Cunningham—one of the chief reference books²⁴ of the Mid-Century. Thus the "taint" which was found in Fielding's mind by Mrs. Barbauld, Aikin, and Scott was now becoming a contagion.

Three years after Lady Louisa Stuart had elaborated the picture of her eighteenth-century kinsman skulking from garret to garret, the first extended biographical account of the novelist since Scott's brief narrative (1821) made its appearance, prefixed to the thick one-volume edition of the *Works*. This edition (1840), by the compiler and translator Thomas Roscoe, was reviewed in the *Times*, as it chanced, by young W. M. Thackeray (of whose attitude toward Fielding a full account will be given presently); but none of the chief magazines—the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, *Blackwood's*, or the *Westminster*—paid any attention to Roscoe's efforts. Apparently neither the editor nor his subject was of sufficient interest to call forth a notice. Roscoe, to be sure, made no attempt at biographical correctness, while his criticism of the novels was almost entirely confined to excerpts from Murphy, Beattie, Chalmers, Aikin, and Byron; still this hastily prepared edition, it must be remembered, was the Fielding which chiefly supplied the Mid-Victorians for nearly a generation thereafter. Nine years before, in a short *Memoir* (for the 1831 *Tom Jones* illustrated by Cruikshank²⁵), Roscoe had defended Fielding by comparing him with Smollett. If, he says, Fielding "sometimes drew scenes which a delicate mind would not willingly contemplate," it was not done "as Smollett did it,"

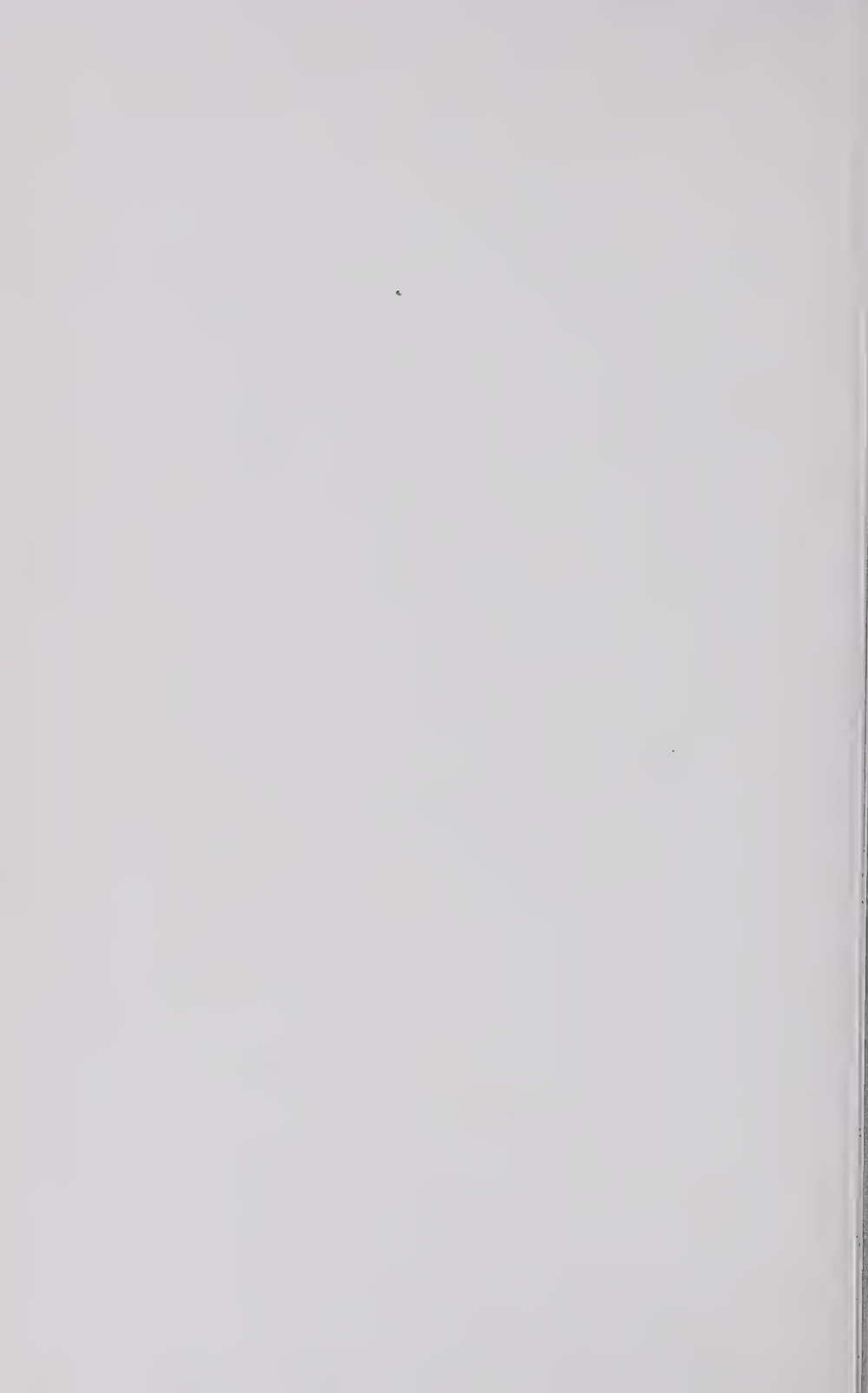
²⁴ *Lives of Eminent and Illustrious Englishmen*, Glasgow, 1837, V, 221-227.

²⁵ *The History of Tom Jones*, London, 1831, I, xix. The Cruikshank *Joseph Andrews* and *Amelia* followed in 1832.



The Battle Royal in the Church Yard:

(Tom Jones, Book IV, Chapter VIII)



that he might "amuse and flatter" the "corrupt" and "sensual," but that he might "warn the inexperienced." And it is clear enough that in his edition of 1840 Roscoe intended to deal handsomely with the novelist. Commencing with a Murphysque exordium in which he ranks his author with Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and Swift as one of the "great teachers and censors of the world," and challenging for him "higher honours than have hitherto been assigned," he praises Fielding as a great investigator, satirist, and artist; denounces those who have disparaged him; and yet, comparing him with Burns, plays up the old stories of Fielding's extravagance and dissipation; accepts, on the authority of Richardson's insinuation, the idea that Fielding is Booth; and—unwittingly perhaps—elaborates the greatness-dissoluteness paradox which Thackeray was to make popular a decade later. Roscoe did not join Scott in looking upon the Walpole anecdote as "humiliating"; to him this attack on Fielding was dictated "by the meanest motives of malice." Nor did he uphold Richardson, whose "long wearisome, thrice-elaborated productions" sleep "undisturbed upon their shelves"; it is "less amusing than revolting," he says, "to observe how eagerly Richardson and his correspondents" kept up "their envious and malignant attacks." Roscoe, in short, would be Fielding's champion, defending him against the "poisoned shafts of surviving malice." Moreover, he prides himself on his exploitation of Fielding's poetry, which he truly says has been "studiously underrated" by preceding biographers; and he calls attention to the "deep wisdom which pervades" all of Fielding's works, and to "his unpromising magnanimous exposure of the vices and errors of the great."²⁶ Yet we rise from the perusal of Roscoe's turgid sentences wondering how such great and thoughtful books could have been written by so dissolute a man. Anyone who sees in Fielding a second Burns is obviously no safe guide.

At a time when a book so innocuous to modern eyes as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was assailed by reviewers as flagrantly

²⁶ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, London and Glasgow, 1840, pp. v-xxv.

"immoral" and "irreligious," and when even a hardened editor like Lockhart could refer to its author as a "brazen miss," it is not strange that fancy portraits of a debauched Fielding were much in demand, and that even a well-intentioned compiler like Roscoe should have been led astray. In the age of Scott, Fielding's detractors had been overpowered by the praise of the majority of the competent—Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and others; in the generation which followed, many of the most prominent men of letters were either indifferent to the novelist or openly inimical. This "fastidious" prejudice, as it was termed by Hazlitt, was keenly felt by the three chief fiction-writers of the period—Bulwer, Dickens, and Thackeray—each of whom voiced a protest against it. Here, for instance, is the condition of affairs in 1832 as presented by Bulwer, who was then the most popular writer of the day: "How little fiction can do towards altering the national disposition, we may see by the small effect produced on us by the true moral of our greatest and most popular novel, 'Tom Jones.' It was this one-sidedness of morality—this undue love of the decorous hypocrisies, and this exaggerated resentment against the erring sincerities of mankind, which Fielding, a more deep, accurate, and scientific moralist than is generally supposed, sought to expose and correct when he contrasted the characters of Blifil and Jones. Nothing can more clearly prove our ignorance of real morals, than the fact that no one appreciated this high moral purpose in our author. The world of writers fell upon him with the commonplaces of the very hypocrisy he was satirizing;—forgot the service he rendered to virtue in unmasking its counterfeit in Blifil—charged him with all the excesses of his hero; and, because he had embodied morality as a philosopher, condemned him for being immoral. Even now his greatest merit is not acknowledged, nor his indecorums forgiven for the sake of their object; and the herd of critics would conceive it a monstrous paradox in him who asserted and undertook to prove that Fielding was a far more profound and noble moralist than Addison. Nay, if Blifil and Jones were living characters, who does not feel that the

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world would visit Blifil as a most praiseworthy man, and cut Jones as an incorrigible scapegrace?" Bulwer ends with the following excellent observation, "It is the misfortune of our social system that we have been taught so *exclusive* a regard for the domestic moralities."²⁷ In a period when the Bowdlerizers were busy with their abhorred shears this protest was unheeded.

Dickens, whose *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838)—intended as a direct answer to the *Jack Sheppard* school of fiction—was attacked as "low," began his well-known prefatorial defense of the book (third edition, 1841) with the following quotation from Fielding: "Some of the author's friends cried, 'Lookee, gentlemen, the man is a villain; but it is Nature for all that'; and the young critics of the age, the clerks, apprentices, etc., called it low, and fell a-groaning." "It is wonderful," continues Dickens, "how Virtue turns from dirty stockings; and how Vice, married to ribbons and a little gay attire, changes her name, as wedded ladies do, and becomes Romance.

. . . I am not aware of any writer in our language having a respect for himself, or held in any respect by his posterity, who ever has descended to the taste of the fastidious classes.

. . . On the other hand, if I look for examples, and for precedents, I find them in the noblest range of English literature. Fielding, De Foe, Goldsmith, Smollett, Richardson . . . all these for wise purposes, and especially the two first, brought upon the scene the very scum and refuse of the land . . . and yet, if I turn back . . . I find the same reproach levelled against them every one, each in his turn, by the insects of the hour, who raised their little hum, and died, and were forgotten." And later, in the preface to the "first cheap edition" of *Oliver Twist*, March, 1850, replying to his adverse critics, Dickens ironically says that "when Fielding described Newgate, the prison immediately ceased to exist."

With Dickens's attitude toward the inconsistent fastidiousness of the age, young Thackeray (then, at least) was in per-

²⁷ "Of English Notions of Morality," in *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1832.

fect accord. In his review of Roscoe's *Fielding* (September 2, 1840), he says, "Many a squeamish lady of our time would fling down one of" Fielding's novels "with horror, but would go through every page of Mr. Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* with perfect comfort to herself." "Ainsworth," continued Thackeray, "dared not paint his hero as the scoundrel he knew him to be; he must keep his brutalities in the background, else the public morals will be outraged, and so he produces a book quite absurd and unreal, and infinitely more immoral than anything Fielding ever wrote. *Jack Sheppard* is immoral actually because it is decorous."²⁸

That Fielding was lacking in imagination, that his novels were immoral, and that both the lack of imagination and the lack of morality were due to the viciousness of his life—such were the tares which, drawing common sustenance from the atmosphere of affected gentility, were prospering in the early Victorian mind. Even the best efforts of certain toilers in the garden could not keep them down. In the manuals of literature most popular in this period, we find the prevalent view of Fielding very clearly reflected. Three of the most widely read "authorities" of the time were Chambers's *Cyclopædia of English Literature* (1844), Craik's *History of Literature* (1845), and Shaw's *Outlines of English Literature* (1847). Of these handbooks the one most touched by a critical spirit is Craik's *History*; and yet the excellent Professor Craik tells us that Fielding presents "merely what we should have seen as lookers on"; and that if "we want to know anything more" of his characters than this, "we must find it out for ourselves." "Even Fielding," he goes on to say, "with all his wit, or at least pregnancy of thought and style—for the quality in his writings to which we allude appears to be the result rather of elaboration than of instinctive perception—would probably have left us nothing much worth preserving in the proper form of a novel, if he had not had his diversified practical knowledge of society to draw upon, and especially his extensive and

²⁸ *The Times*, September 2, 1840.

intimate acquaintance with the lower orders of all classes, in painting whom he is always greatest and most at home."²⁹

Shaw, drawing—in his *Outlines of English Literature* (1847)—a darker picture, speaks of Fielding's "easy laxity of morals," which "held as venial any trespasses on propriety so long as they were accompanied and excused by a generosity and manly liberality of feeling." This leads him to the amazing conclusion that "such a person," who "must have looked upon" Richardson's "citizen-like inculcation of strict morality" as "fair game," may "be charged, and justly, with a very low standard of moral rectitude and virtue." Apparently with Scott in mind, he finds that Smollett, "not less rich and inventive," was "capable of disputing the crown of supremacy with Fielding himself"; and that "Fathom is far superior in interest" to Fielding's Jonathan. On the other hand, there is Richardson, who, though no "longer very generally read," is a "great, profound, creative, and, above all, truly original genius, devoting a powerful and active intellect to the holy cause of virtue and honour"—a "bright ornament to human nature, and a prime glory of his country's literature."³⁰

And here is the comparison between Fielding and Richardson given in Chambers's *Cyclopædia of English Literature* (1844). Richardson was "a pious, respectable man," who "made the passions move at the command of virtue," and whose *Clarissa* is "one of the brightest triumphs of the whole range of imaginative literature." Fielding, we are told, is lacking in "pathos and sentiment," and in the "higher cast of thought"; his works, though humorous, are deficient in the "imaginative faculty" and they are "not allied to virtue." He was "a thoughtless man of fashion—a rake who had dissipated his fortune, and passed from high to low without dignity or respect; and who had commenced author without any higher

²⁹ Craik, G. L., *Sketches of the History of Literature . . . in England*, London, 1845, V, 157-158.

³⁰ Shaw, T. B., *Outlines of English Literature*, London, 1849, pp. 319, 321, 323, 324, 327, 315, 317 (Preface dated "Aug. 10, 1847").

motive than to make money, and confer amusement."³¹ Think of the thousands, young and old, who, turning to this "authority" on English literature, were thus instructed for years to come concerning the dissolute and merely humorous Fielding!

The significant fact is that this opinion of the author was not confined to the compilers of text-books. Such influential prose writers as Carlyle, Ruskin, and De Quincey held him in low esteem, and even Macaulay, despite his admiration, considered Fielding's work inferior—as regards both wisdom and morality—to that of his beloved Richardson. Back in 1823, Carlyle, while busy with German fiction, had written his brother, "Have you read Fielding's novels? They are genuine things; though if you were not a decent fellow, I should pause before recommending them, their morality is so loose."³² But if it really was the morality of Fielding's work to which Carlyle objected, how could he stomach either Smollett or Sterne? In his *Lectures on Literature*³³ he found room for Sterne but not for Fielding; in his *Friedrich* he went out of his way to compliment Smollett. "Excellent Tobias," he exclaims, "courage, my brave young Tobias; . . . you will do your errand in some measure."³⁴ Moreover, according to Allingham, he warmly "praised" Smollett's "pathos."³⁵ Though, as we have seen, the youthful Carlyle in an early reference or two paid his respects to Fielding's position as a novelist, he seems never to have liked him. Francis Espinasse writes—to quote the rest of the passage previously referred to

³¹ Chambers, R., *Cyclopædia of English Literature*, Edinburgh, II (1844), 161-163. See also Chambers's *History of English Literature*, Hartford, 1837 (first ed., 1835)—according to the compiler the "only" work of the sort in existence—in which we are told that Fielding's "greatest fault is his imperfect and incorrect morality."

³² Carlyle's *Early Letters*, edited by Norton, London, 1886, p. 293.

³³ *Lectures on the History of Literature (April to July, 1838)*, edited by J. R. Green, New York, 1892.

³⁴ Carlyle's *History of Friedrich the Second*, New York, 1862, III, 299 (ch. xii).

³⁵ Allingham's *Diary*, London, 1907, p. 212.

—"I never heard Carlyle speak of . . . Fielding. . . . But he called the day on which he first read *Roderick Random* one of the sunniest of his life(!), and a good biography of Smollett, he thought, was among the few things of the kind which then remained to be done."⁸⁶ Presumably Carlyle was biased in part by what he conceived to have been Fielding's life. He was, no doubt, impressed by the old slanders; for when he gave a copy of *Bampfylde-Moore Carew* to Norton he regretted that it was not an edition which contained the part (the scandalous part) about Fielding.⁸⁷ But one of the main reasons that he failed to appreciate the novelist is to be inferred from a passage in his review of Croker's *Boswell*,⁸⁸ in which, during his disparagement of fiction as a genus, he says, "Thus, here and there, a *Tom Jones*, a *Meister*, a *Crusoe*, will yield no little solacement to the minds of men; though still immeasurably less than a *Reality* would." Farther on he writes, "[Man's] highest spiritual endowment [is] that of revealing Poetic Beauty." By "Poetic Beauty" Carlyle seems to mean idealistic or mystical beauty; the realism of Fielding was not to Carlyle a "*Reality*" at all. Had he only seen fit to include Fielding among his "heroes," what a tremendous difference eventually this inclusion would have made!

Ruskin, not yet old enough to be influential as a writer, had already made up his mind about Fielding and about Richardson as well; to him, also, Fielding was lacking in morality and in imagination. An out-and-out Richardsonian, Ruskin, as a young man of twenty-two, wrote of *Sir Charles Grandison*: "At present I feel disposed to place this work above all other works of fiction I know. It is very, very grand; and has, I think, a greater practical effect on me for good than anything

⁸⁶ Espinasse, Francis, *Literary Recollections*, New York, 1893, p. 227. The exclamation point is in the text. To Carlyle the scene of Humphry Clinker at the smithy was unsurpassed "by Dante or anyone else."—D. A. Wilson, *Carlyle till Marriage*, London, 1923, p. 66.

⁸⁷ *Letters of . . . Norton*, Boston and New York, 1913, I, 494.

⁸⁸ *Fraser's Magazine*, April, 1832.

I ever read in my life."³⁹ In his thirties he said, "Of fiction, read *Sir Charles Grandison*, Scott's novels, Miss Edgeworth's";⁴⁰ and later, "In Romance, I am again divided between *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Don Quixote*."⁴¹ When he was sixty, he spoke of Richardson as "the greatest of our English moral story-tellers";⁴² and in his eightieth year he referred to "the deep admiration I still feel for Richardson."⁴³ Very different was his attitude toward Richardson's rival, "I cannot, for the life of me, understand the feelings of men of magnificent wit and intellect, like Smollett and Fielding," wrote young Ruskin to a "College Friend" in 1840, "when I see them gloating over and licking their chops over nastiness, like hungry dogs over ordure; founding one half of the laughable matter of their volumes in innuendoes of abomination. Not that I think, as many people do, they are bad books; for I don't think these pieces of open filth are in reality injurious to the mind, or, at least *as* injurious as corrupt sentiment and disguised immorality, such as you get some times in Bulwer, and men of his school. But I cannot *understand* the taste. I can't imagine why men who have real wit at their command should *perfuse* it as they do."⁴⁴

De Quincey, likewise, regarded the great realist as a writer of low aims. On one occasion he stigmatizes Fielding as a "deliberate falsehood-monger," who, being too indolent to master "a real living idiom," put in the mouth of his Squire a "childish and fantastic babble" and thus "commenced the practice of systematically traducing" our "country gentlemen."⁴⁵ And again he exclaims, "How coarse are the ideals of Fielding!—his odious Squire Western, his odious Tom

³⁹ *The Works of John Ruskin*, edited by Cook and Wedderburn, London and New York, 1907, XXXV, 308.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XV, 227.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XXV, 355.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XXXV, 542.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 418.

⁴⁵ *The Collected Writings of De Quincey*, edited by Masson, Edinburgh, 1889, I, 343, 344.

Jones!"⁴⁶ To arraign Fielding for coarseness of ideals because he chose to describe a Squire Western seems a strange proceeding; but this attitude of De Quincey and others toward realism was a definite point of view which must be understood and reckoned with. Measured by the standards of romantic elegance, the author of *Tom Jones* was of course found wanting.⁴⁷

Then there was Macaulay, who, defender as he was of Fielding, always regarded Richardson as more moral and more profound. Looking again at the article which he sent as a boy to *The Christian Observer*, we notice that even then, despite his commendation of Joseph Andrews, Fanny, and Parson Adams, he classed the novels of Fielding not with those which like Richardson's were exempt "from blame" but with those which were "more obnoxious to censure than most others."⁴⁸ *Waverley*, at that time, he placed in the "harmless and entertaining" class; and as the Scotch Novels continued to appear, his love for Scott, rising to a great height, became the inspiration for his essay on "History" (1828) and, in part, for his own historical method. Even from the beginning (and during the rest of his career), Fielding, highly as he regarded him, was subordinated in Macaulay's affection to Richardson and to Scott as well. In 1841 (February 5) when he delivered his famous speech on the copyright, he was not sure enough of Fielding's reputation to use him as evidence in court; of Richardson's, however, he was absolutely certain. "Most of us . . ." he asserted, "have known persons who, very erroneously as I think, but from the best motives, would not choose to reprint Fielding's novels, or Gibbon's . . . Decline

⁴⁶ *The North British Review*, May, 1848 (article on Forster's *Goldsmith*).

⁴⁷ De Quincey, however, criticizes Richardson for his "servile" attitude toward a "fine gentleman" and for his adoration of Lovelace. *The Posthumous Works of . . . De Quincey*, edited by Japp, London 1891, I, 114.

⁴⁸ *The Christian Observer*, American ed., XV, 785 (December, 1816).

and Fall. . . . Some gentlemen may perhaps be of opinion, that it would be as well if Tom Jones and Gibbon's History were never reprinted. I will not, then, dwell on these or similar cases. I will take cases respecting which it is not likely that there will be any difference of opinion here. . . . Take Richardson's novels . . . No writings have done more to raise the fame of English genius in foreign countries. No writings are more deeply pathetic. No writings, those of Shakespeare excepted, show more profound knowledge of the human heart. As to their moral tendency, I can cite the most respectable testimony. Dr. Johnson describes Richardson as one who had taught the passions to move at the command of virtue."⁴⁹

Can it be, we are inclined to ask, that a man of Macaulay's acquaintance with the world could really believe that Richardson's novels show "more profound knowledge of the human heart" than Fielding's, or was he merely exploiting Richardson for the purposes of his brief? There is every reason to think that Macaulay meant every word he said concerning Richardson not only as a moralist but as an artist. It is true that he did not disparage Fielding. Though he dwelt upon the popular idea of the novelist's extreme poverty,⁵⁰ he meant no harm. He censured Johnson for being "grossly unjust"⁵¹ to Fielding and for failing to recognize him as one of the "great originals"; he frequently referred to him in his essays⁵² and was fond of reading⁵³ aloud from his works; yet according to Trevelyan *Clarissa* was his "favorite romance," and on reading that novel again he wrote in his diary, April 15, 1850, "I nearly cried my eyes out."⁵⁴ In view of the evidence, it is clear that

⁴⁹ Macaulay's *Works*, edited by Lady Trevelyan, New York, 1866, VIII, 204-205.

⁵⁰ Review of Croker's edition of Boswell's *Johnson*, September, 1831.

⁵¹ Review of Mme. D'Arblay's *Diary*, January, 1843.

⁵² See, among other references, his review of *The Life and Writings of Addison*, July, 1843.

⁵³ J. C. Morison's *Macaulay*, New York, 1894, p. 172.

⁵⁴ Trevelyan's *Life*, New York, 1876, II, 237. See also Thackeray's "Nil Nisi Bonum."

Macaulay actually believed—as they did in the eighteenth century—that *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison* ranked next to the plays of Shakespeare in “profound knowledge of the human heart”; and it is equally clear that no such opinion was ever entertained by him regarding *Tom Jones*.

As we pause for a moment at this stage in our history, we can hardly fail to notice the change in attitude toward Fielding which was taking place during the 'Thirties and the 'Forties: we miss the enthusiasm of Lamb and Hazlitt and Coleridge and Leigh Hunt. This does not mean, of course, that laudation of the novelist suddenly ceased—even Ruskin admits that in this period Fielding's “name” was “of repute”; but the number of persons competent in literature who put on record a cordial appreciation of his works was becoming palpably fewer; and even those who praised him found it more often necessary to assume the attitude of defense. Across the Channel, regret at the growing neglect of Fielding was voiced by Stendhal, who stoutly declared that *Tom Jones* was “to other novels what the Iliad is among the epics.”⁵⁵ In England, on the contrary, Thomas Hood protested against the statement (frequently made during the heated discussion of the Copyright Bill) that the great prose-epic was becoming “antiquated.” “There is one Fielding,” he rejoined in his “Copyright and Copywrong,” “whose last novel was published a century ago, and, consequently, has been common spoil for some forescore years. Will any one be bold enough to say, that a revived copyright of ‘Tom Jones’ would be valueless in the market?”⁵⁶ To an ultra-religious woman who pestered him with doctrinal tracts Hood replied: “Madam, . . . Perhaps I have to congratulate myself,” as Joseph Andrews did “on the preservation of his virtue from that amorous widow, Lady Booby! But whatever impropriety you intended to commit has been providentially frustrated.”⁵⁷ To his mind, the hue and

⁵⁵ *Mémoires d'un Touriste par de Stendhal*, Paris, 1877.

⁵⁶ *The Works of Thomas Hood*, edited by his son and daughter, London, 1872, VIII, 265.

⁵⁷ Walter Jerrold's *Thomas Hood*, New York, 1909, pp. 403, 350.

cry against Fielding as an immoral writer was nothing less than absurd. And he made so bold as to tell the ultra-religious woman that the reason her "faction" decried literature was that "all the most celebrated authors, the wisest, and most learned in the ways of mankind" had "concurred in denouncing," as Fielding did, "sanctimonious folly and knavery of every description."⁵⁸

Among those who defended Fielding most valiantly in the magazines was G. H. Lewes. Ever and again the old charge was repeated that the author of *Tom Jones* was inferior to the author of the *Waverley Novels*. Scott "lives more in the upper, and yet as much in the lower air, as Fielding,"⁵⁹ wrote Allan Cunningham; and the statement was a commonplace of criticism. This assertion seemed to Lewes so unjust that in the December number (1847) of *Fraser's Magazine* he made it his business to refute it. "Scott," he writes, "has greater invention, more varied powers, a more poetical and pictorial imagination; but although his delineation of character is generally true, as far as it goes, it is never deep; and his deficiencies are singularly apparent, when, as in *St. Ronan's Well*, he ventures into the perilous sphere of contemporary life." By a famous pronouncement in this article Lewes scandalized Charlotte Brontë when he remarked that he would rather have "written *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Tom Jones*, than any of the *Waverley Novels*." Defying popular opinion he bravely declared that "Fielding and Miss Austen" were "the greatest novelists in our language."⁶⁰

Though Fielding's popularity was dimmed by the vogue of Scott, it was not, particularly in the magazines, extinguished by it. Other reviewers beside Lewes were not unfriendly to him, though there are fewer references to his works than might be imagined. Take, for example, *The Westminster Review*, which seems to have been especially well disposed. In

⁵⁸ Walter Jerrold's *Thomas Hood*, p. 404.

⁵⁹ *Biographical and Critical History of the British Literature*, Paris, 1834, p. 150.

⁶⁰ *Fraser's Magazine*, XXXVI, 687.

January, 1832, a reference⁶¹ is made to "Fielding, who so thoroughly knew the heart in all its corruptions"; and in April, the reviewer speaks of the main novelists as Le Sage, Fielding, and Scott. In one of the articles of 1835 the statement occurs that, great as he is, Scott could never have "achieved that immortal contrast, so consummately moral, of Blifil and Jones."⁶² In Leigh Hunt's review of the 1837 edition of Lady Mary's letters, her ladyship's condescension in her treatment of her cousin is remarked upon; and in an article on Mitford's *Gray* during the same year Bulwer was one of the first to complain of the poet's mistreatment of *Joseph Andrews*. Gray, he says, "evidently rates that wonderful fiction very little above the run of novels, and hurries away with complacent preference to Marivaux and Crébillon."⁶³

By the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* Fielding was less frequently mentioned; but an examination of these and other magazines of the period shows clearly enough that though public librarians and clergymen (whose charge it is to look after public morals) were putting the ban on Fielding's novels, these novels were still employed by reviewers as standards by which to test, as they appeared, new experiments in fiction. Thus the once famous D. M. Moir ("Delta") and Nassau Senior use Fielding as a touchstone on which to try, respectively, the picture of urban life presented by Theodore Hook, and the "intellectual" theory of fiction of Bulwer.⁶⁴ In the opinion of Senior (as in that of Lewes) *Tom Jones* and *Persuasion* are among those "tales to which the rules of art have been most carefully and most successfully applied."⁶⁵

Of particular interest are the early reviews of the works of Dickens and Thackeray; it is not true, as has sometimes

⁶¹ *The Westminster Review*, XVI, 217.

⁶² *Ibid.*, XXX, 479.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XXVII, 12 (July, 1837). Reprinted in Lytton's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, New York, 1868, I, 138.

⁶⁴ See D. M. Moir's *Sketches*, p. 358; and Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, London, 1864, p. 238.

⁶⁵ Senior's *Essays*, p. 239.

been assumed, that Fielding was forgotten before their time—witness the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* notices concerning *Pickwick*. “Of Fielding’s intuitive perception of the springs of action, and skill in the construction of the prose epic . . .” wrote Croker⁶⁶ in the *Quarterly* (1837), “or Smollett’s dash . . . and rich poetic imagination—he [Dickens] has none.” The *Edinburgh* has this to say (October, 1838): “We think [Dickens] . . . the truest and most spirited delineator of English life, amongst the middle and lower classes, since the days of Smollett and Fielding.”⁶⁷ And during the following year the *Quarterly*,⁶⁸ making war on the “so-called fashionable novelists,” declared that there was “more strength in half a page of Fielding . . . than in a whole ship-load of the diluted, maudlin” fiction of the day.

Even as early as *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* the resemblance between Thackeray and Fielding drew forth the following comment from John Sterling, who wrote (December 11, 1841): “What is there better in Fielding or Goldsmith? . . . There is more truth and nature in one of these papers than in all” Dickens’s novels “together.” Carlyle’s note on this passage runs: “Thackeray, always a close friend of the Sterling house, will observe that this is dated 1841, not 1851, and have his own reflections on the matter!”⁶⁹ After *Vanity Fair* appeared and the resemblance between Thackeray and Fielding had become a critical commonplace, allusions to the elder writer grew much more frequent. *Vanity Fair*, declared Whipple, in *The North American Review*, is an “attempt, somewhat after the manner of Fielding, to represent the world as it is, especially the selfish, heartless, and cunning portion” of it. “The author has Fielding’s cosy manner of talking to his readers in the pauses of his narrative, and, like Fielding, takes his personages mostly from ordinary life.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *The Quarterly Review*, LIX, 484.

⁶⁷ *The Edinburgh Review*, LXVIII, 76.

⁶⁸ *The Quarterly Review*, LXIV, 349.

⁶⁹ Carlyle’s *The Life of John Sterling*, London, 1851, p. 287.

⁷⁰ *The North American Review*, LXVII, 368 (October, 1848).

In England, the most notable of the reviews of Thackeray was Abraham Hayward's account of *Vanity Fair* in the *Edinburgh*, January, 1848, in which a "partial resemblance" was discovered between the two Amelias, Captain Osborn and Captain Booth, and Sir Pitt Crawley and Squire Western.⁷¹

Rather among the novelists themselves, however, than among the reviewers do we find the more genuine and consistent enthusiasm for Fielding. There were, of course, notable exceptions. Perhaps his most violent enemy was Charlotte Brontë, of whom more will be said later. And Anthony Trollope (who before the end of his career learned to value Fielding) very "early in his Post Office days" came "to the conclusion that *Pride and Prejudice* pleased him better than any other fiction he had ever read"; that it was not "perhaps so great a work as *Ivanhoe*," but that it was "immeasurably above *Tom Jones*."⁷² Charles Kingsley, some years afterwards, spoke of writing a "story about the Methodists, and the fury of the Squire Westerns and Parson Trullibers against them."⁷³ So much for the complainers. As we turn now to Fielding's admirers in the department of prose narrative we need not dwell upon forgotten names. No one, for example, thought more of the author of *Tom Jones* than "Plumer" Ward, once of repute, who went so far as to call a book of his, *Fielding; or Society* (1838)—saying in the dedication, "Fielding was, you know, a great observer of mankind, and penetrated the inmost recesses of the heart almost as shrewdly as his namesake."⁷⁴ We may spend our time in the company of the three most popular novelists of the day—Bulwer, Dickens, and Thackeray—whose *obiter dicta* should now be recorded in some detail.

Bulwer, who—despite certain borrowings—was never a

⁷¹ *The Edinburgh Review*, LXXXVII, 63.

⁷² Escott, T. H. S., *Anthony Trollope*, London and New York, 1913, p. 25; also *Autobiography*, second ed., Edinburgh and London, 1883, I, 55.

⁷³ Kingsley, C., *Letters and Memories*, London, 1901, I, 187.

⁷⁴ Ward, R. P., *Fielding; or Society*, Philadelphia, 1838, p. vii.

disciple of Fielding's, wrote frequently and at length (though not always consistently) about his art. In a later period, while following Sterne in his *Caxtons*, he highly commended Richardson as well; but in his earlier years he was particularly cordial in his appreciation of Fielding. It is significant that in his "In Memoriam" on Scott (1832), not Richardson or Sterne or Smollett, but Fielding was chosen for purposes of comparison. "Fielding, Le Sage, and Cervantes," he declares, "are the only three writers, since the world began, with whom, as a novelist," he can be mentioned.⁷⁵ In his review of Lockhart's *Scott* (1838) he writes: "In *Novels* Fielding certainly excelled him [Scott] in some very high attributes, and *Tom Jones* is better than the *Antiquary*. But in *romance*, Scott stands [supreme]. . . ." "Fielding and Cervantes alone rival Scott in the breadth and depth of his humour; and the first seldom exhibits equal delicacy in the vein."⁷⁶ For Fielding as a constructive artist, however, Bulwer has the highest praise. "In the greatest works of Fielding," he writes, "a very obtuse critic may perceive that the author sat down to write in order to embody a design previously formed. The perception of moral truths urged him to the composition of his fictions." "In 'Jonathan Wild,'" he continues, by way of illustration, "the finest prose satire in the English language, Fielding, before he set pen to paper, had resolved to tear the mask from false greatness. In his conception of the characters and histories of Blifil and Jones, he was bent on dethroning that popular idol—false virtue. The scorn of hypocrisy in all grades, all places, was the intellectual passion of Fielding, and his masterpieces are the results of his intense convictions. That many incidents never contemplated would suggest them[selves] as he proceeded—that the technical plan of events might deviate and vary, according as he saw new modes of enforcing his aims, is unquestionable. But still Fielding always commenced *with a plan*—with a conception—with a moral end,

⁷⁵ *The New Monthly Magazine*, October, 1832, pp. 302-304.

⁷⁶ See "Art in Fiction," in *The Monthly Chronicle*, 1838.

to be achieved by definite agencies, and through the medium of certain characters preformed in his mind." In one of his letters, presumably thinking of Coleridge, Bulwer says that the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and *Tom Jones* are "three masterpieces in narrative which can never be too much studied."⁷⁷

Still, though expressing the highest admiration for Fielding's constructive power, Bulwer regarded the "imaginative" portrayal of character as superior to what he calls the "actual." "Let us take a work—the greatest the world possesses in those Schools [*i.e.*, the "lower Schools of Art"], and in which the flesh-and-blood vitality of the characters is especially marked—I mean, *Tom Jones*—and compare it with *Hamlet*. The chief characters in *Tom Jones* are all plain, visible, eating, drinking, and walking beings; those in *Hamlet* are shadowy, solemn, and mysterious. . . . But who shall say that the characters in *Tom Jones* are better drawn than those in *Hamlet*—or that there is greater skill necessary in the highest walk of the Actual School, than in that of the Imaginative?"⁷⁸ It is true that Bulwer professed to have received hints from Fielding even in characterization; his own "Mr. Fielden," he says, in his *Lucretia* (1846) "is a composite, to which the Vicar of Wakefield and Parson Adams have contributed the materials."⁷⁹ But he never succeeded in producing that prose-fiction *Hamlet* which was to be as real as *Tom Jones*.

As regards Dickens, reminiscences of Fielding in *Pickwick Papers* were, as we have seen, detected immediately; for did not the author say in chapter viii, "Fielding tells us that man is fire, and woman tow, and the Prince of Darkness sets a light to 'em?" George Borrow, who delighted not only in *Pickwick* but in *Oliver Twist*, welcomed young Dickens as "a second

⁷⁷ See the *New York Sun*, March 25, 1908.

⁷⁸ *The New Monthly Magazine*, XXXV, 405, 406, 407.

⁷⁹ For other references to Fielding, see preface to *Pelham*, edition of 1840; preface to *The Disowned* (1835); and the "Tomlinsoniana" of *Paul Clifford*.

Fielding.”⁸⁰ Present-day critics usually say that it was Smollett, not Fielding, who influenced Dickens—a very natural assumption, since both authors dealt primarily with eccentricities of character. By the contemporaries of Dickens, however, the honor of paternity was so frequently divided between Smollett and Fielding that Elizabeth Barrett, advancing the claims of Victor Hugo, protested, in a letter to R. H. Horne, against the common notion that Fielding and Smollett alone were the “ideals and models before him.”⁸¹ Horne himself had heard so much about the similarity of Dickens and Fielding that in his *New Spirit of the Age* (1844) he endeavored to correct what to him was an erroneous idea. Granting a resemblance in “fleshly solidity, costume, and completeness” of “external portraitures,” he finds that while Fielding is a great designer of “plot and narrative” Dickens has merely “a leading idea, but no design at all.”⁸² Without following the discussion we may note the fact that by contemporary critics the novels of Dickens were, particularly in the earlier years, very often compared to those of his great predecessor.

It may also be observed that Dickens himself thought much more of Fielding than has commonly been supposed. J. T. Fields tells us, in his *Yesterdays with Authors*, that Dickens “preferred Smollett to Fielding, putting ‘Peregrine Pickle’ above ‘Tom Jones’”;⁸³ but according to George Barnett Smith,⁸⁴ who also knew him personally, Dickens’s “most unfeigned admiration” for Fielding “grew as he grew, and there was no novelist for whom” he cherished “such a feeling of respect.” To his mind, Fielding’s “power over Dickens was unquestionably immense.” At this point we may profitably

⁸⁰ In a letter dated February 22, 1839; see Herbert Jenkins’s *Life of George Borrow*, New York and London, 1912, p. 394.

⁸¹ *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning addressed to . . . Horne*, London, 1877, I, 242 (February 20, 1844).

⁸² Horne, R. H., *A New Spirit of the Age*, second ed., London, 1844, I, 72.

⁸³ J. T. Fields’s *Yesterdays with Authors*, eighth ed., Boston, 1874, p. 239.

⁸⁴ G. B. Smith’s *Poets and Novelists*, New York, 1876, p. 304.

turn to the English Men of Letters *Dickens* and let Sir A. W. Ward conduct the argument. After summarizing the findings on the side of Smollett, he says:⁸⁵ "But these are for the most part mere details. The manner of Dickens as a whole resembles Fielding's more strikingly than Smollett's, as it was only natural that it should. The irony of Smollett is drier than was reconcilable with Dickens's nature; it is only in the occasional extravagances of his humour that the former anticipates anything in the latter, and it is only the coarsest scenes of Dickens's earlier books—such as that between Noah, Charlotte, and Mrs. Sowerberry in *Oliver Twist*—which recall the whole manner of his predecessor." In the judgment of this distinguished critic, "it was impossible that Dickens should prefer the general method of the novel of adventure pure and simple . . . to the less crude form adopted by Fielding. . . . With Fielding's, moreover, Dickens's whole nature was congenial; they both had that tenderness which Smollett lacked; and the circumstance that, of all English writers of the past, Fielding's name alone was given by Dickens to one of his sons, shows how, like so many of Fielding's readers he had learnt to love him with an almost personal affection. The very spirit of the author of *Tom Jones*—that gaiety which . . . renders even brutality agreeable, and that charm of sympathetic feeling which makes us love those of his characters which he loves himself—seems astir in some of the most delightful passages . . . in *Pickwick*, to begin with, in which, by the way, Fielding is cited with a twinkle of the eye all his own, and in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where a chapter opens with a passage which is pure Fielding."

To the people of Glasgow, in 1847, Dickens said: "We never tire of the friendships we form with books. . . . Sophia's muff will be seen and loved, by another than Tom Jones, going down High Street some winter day."⁸⁶ As he uttered this sentence he pictured to himself, no doubt, that "blessed little room" (so delightfully described in *David Cop-*

⁸⁵ Ward's *Dickens*, New York, 1882, pp. 197-198.

⁸⁶ Forster's *Dickens*, Bk. VI, ch. i.

perfield) in which, as a small boy, he had first come under the spell of Fielding and had "been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together."⁸⁷ Though there are in his works fewer direct references than might be expected to the great name he conferred upon one of his sons, it is clear that he had Fielding in mind more often than has been ordinarily imagined. Richardson, he frankly confessed, was "no great favourite"⁸⁸ of his; but Fielding was his guide and counsellor on more than one occasion. When his *Oliver Twist* was attacked, it was Fielding to whom he turned for an apposite quotation; and when he felt called upon to defend his inclusion in *Little Dorrit* of "The History of a Self Tormentor," he wrote, as Forster tells us: "I have no doubt that a great part of Fielding's reason for the introduced story . . . was, that it is sometimes really impossible to present, in a full book, the idea that it contains (which yet it may be on all accounts desirable to present), without supposing the reader to be possessed of almost as much romantic allowance, as would put him on a level with the writer"—a passage concerning which Forster remarks, "A happier hint of apology" than this for Fielding's Man of the Hill "could hardly be given."⁸⁹ Throughout Dickens's world of characters there is no Tom Jones, and the reason for this omission—thus given in another letter to Forster—should be placed beside Thackeray's more famous *dictum* in *Pendennis*. In *his* day, asserted Dickens, a character "*must* be presented to you" in an "unnatural aspect by reason of your morality, and is not to have, I will not say any of the indecencies you like, but not even any of the experiences, trials, perplexities, and confusions, inseparable from the making or unmaking of a man."⁹⁰ That Dickens's affection for Fielding "grew as he grew" is indicated by certain passages in letters to his friends, particularly in one addressed

⁸⁷ *David Copperfield*, ch. iv.

⁸⁸ *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, London, 1893, p. 168 (letter of January 28, 1847).

⁸⁹ Forster's *Dickens*, Bk. VIII, ch. i; *Little Dorrit*, ch. xxi.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Bk. XI, ch. i.

to Mark Lemon. We may note, by the way, that in the children's theatricals at Dickens's, when *Tom Thumb* was given, his son, Henry Fielding Dickens "admirably sustained the name" part, and Mark Lemon, as the Giantess—with a coal-scuttle for a helmet—"was simply irresistible."⁹¹ Later he wrote Lemon of the "beautiful" passage in Fielding's *Journey to the Next World* which tells how "the baby he had lost many years before was found by him all radiant and happy, building him a bower in the Elysian Fields where they were to live together when he came."⁹² This affecting scene made a deep impression upon Dickens; some months after, he again made use of it (in a letter of condolence to a bereaved mother), and referred to its creator as "one of the greatest English writers."⁹³ We may believe that as Dickens progressed in life-experience he appreciated more and more that tenderness in Fielding which was so lacking in Smollett.

It would be an interesting literary fact—if it could be proved—that one of the earliest persons to detect in *Pickwick* a reminiscence of Fielding was young William Makepeace Thackeray, as yet a writer for periodicals. In an account of *Boz* and *Pickwick Papers* in the *Westminster*⁹⁴ for 1837, a reviewer who signs himself "Θ" calls attention to the "opening of the second chapter" in *Pickwick* [*i.e.*, "That punctual servant of all work, the sun" . . .] as being "in a style of mock-profundity and mock-epic, which reminds us of Fielding"; and then proffers this bit of advice: "The renown of Fielding and of Smollett is that to which he [Dickens] should aspire, and labour to emulate, and, if possible, to surpass." This article, however, cannot be claimed for Thackeray. Despite

⁹¹ A. T. Dickens's "My Father and his Friends," in *The Cosmopolitan*, LII, 152 (January, 1912). The version of *Tom Thumb* was that of Kane O'Hara.

⁹² Dickens's *Letters*, second ed., London, 1880, I, 394 (April 26, 1855).

⁹³ *Charles Dickens and Maria Beadnell*, Boston, 1908, p. 118 (June 13, 1855).

⁹⁴ *The Westminster Review*, XXVII, 211, 213.

the "Θ" signature it was written by Charles Buller—as we are told by Carlyle,⁹⁵ who flouts the idea that the author of such stuff as *Pickwick* could ever aspire to the place of a Smollett. But from other references which were certainly by Thackeray we see that for several years, at any rate, before his review of Roscoe (September 2, 1840), he occasionally alluded to the great novelist whom he was soon to choose as his model. In his "Batch of Novels for Christmas, 1837," which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in January, 1838,⁹⁶ he tells us that there are scenes in Mrs. Trollope's works "which, if they had been written by Fielding," could "scarcely be less unscrupulously filthy"; and during the same month, in the *Times*,⁹⁷ he paraphrases the famous words of "an ancient, though polite writer" so as to read, "Why witch?" In April, 1839, in "Parisian Caricatures: Lithography," he exclaims: "O wondrous power of genius! Fielding's men and women are alive, though History's are not"—and he goes on to picture the author "in a watch or spunging-house, fuddled, most likely," creating his famous characters: "Is not Amelia preparing her husband's little supper? is not Miss Snap chastely preventing the crime of Mr Firebrand? is not Parson Adams in the midst of his family, and Mr Wild taking his last bowl of punch with the Newgate Ordinary?"⁹⁸ In June, 1840, in his article on Cruikshank, there are still other references.⁹⁹ "Who would mar the prospects" of "Tom Jones?" he asks; and answers, "Only a very stern moralist indeed"; he declares that there is "hardly a man in England who can read but will laugh at . . . the humour of Joseph Andrews"; finally he exclaims, "O that Hogarth could have illustrated Fielding . . . ! and fixed down on paper those grand figures of Parson Adams, and Squire Allworthy, and the great Jonathan Wild."

⁹⁵ *Letters of Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill*, London, 1923, pp. 155, 206.

⁹⁶ *Fraser's Magazine*, XVII, 84-85.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, January 11, 1838.

⁹⁸ *The Westminster Review*, XXXII, 294-296.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, XXXIV, 13, 10, 53.

Even in these early allusions—which were made before he did the more careful reading required by his review of Roscoe—we catch a glimpse of the paradoxical portrait of the novelist which Thackeray continued to draw—with variations—during the rest of his life. Ever since his school-days, when he illustrated a copy of *Joseph Andrews*,¹⁰⁰ he had kept Fielding in mind, though his idea of him both as man and writer was distorted by the prevailing Early-Victorian attitude. Finally, as Mr. F. S. Dickson¹⁰¹—a student of both Fielding and Thackeray—tells us, he became so absorbed in reading the novels in Roscoe while he was preparing his review of that volume that he brought his "Shabby Genteel Story," then running as a serial, "abruptly" to a close (October, 1840), and thereafter, following in the pathway of his master, found himself on the highroad to success.

It is clear that Thackeray spent the time to some purpose reading and writing in the sunshiny little arbor; for into this unsigned review went some of the best things he ever said of his famous exemplar. Fielding, he saw, possessed a number of the finest human qualities that have ever been recorded of any man; and he bowed in sincere adoration before a supreme artist in the craft of fiction. "A great deal of tenderness and love goes along" with the kind of "laughter" you find here; for even the "equivocal" characters are painted in so "masterly" a manner, that they never cease to be lifelike. Here are no prodigies, such as those of Richardson, but a "strong, real picture" of life as it is; nor should a *chef d'œuvre* like *Tom Jones* be confused with the rambling adventures of a Roderick Random—"at the end of which the fiddles are brought, and there is a marriage." "Let any man," he writes, examine Fielding's great novel "as a work of art merely, and it must strike him as the most astonishing production of human ingenuity" such "a literary providence" is "not to be seen in any other work of fiction"; and "it is marvellous to think how the

¹⁰⁰ *Thackerayana*, London, 1875, pp. 74-77.

¹⁰¹ *The North American Review*, CXCVII, 523.

author could have built and carried all the structure in his brain" before "he began to put it to paper." And as early as 1840 Thackeray had fallen in love with that "exquisite performance," *Amelia*—the "most beautiful and delicious description of a character that is to be found in any writer, not excepting Shakespeare." So much for the praise of Fielding, though many another glowing sentence might well be transcribed; now for the blame, which, after the Early Victorian fashion, was lavishly mingled with the praise. Concerning the Walpole story, Thackeray tells us (perhaps thinking of Hazlitt, of whom he had written previously), that "it is that vulgar, dirty cloth that shocks the world so much, and that horrid low company—not the mutton"; yet in a sentence or two before, fearing "very much" that Fielding "did even worse in the course of his hard life than what Walpole has described of him," he exclaims, "Great were his errors, doubtless, and low his tastes." He quarrels with Scott for speaking "rather slightly" of *Amelia*; but he follows his lead in attributing many of the "errors" of Fielding and his "works" to the school in which "the poor fellow" was bred. And again he pictures for us "young Harry Fielding," ready "for a row, or a bottle, or what else you please,"—"a young fellow upon town with very loose morals indeed," who "never seems to have thought of much beyond the pleasure of living and being jolly." Though "his heart was pure," he "led a sad, riotous life, and mixed with many a bad woman in his time." Then there is the "wet cloth" (Thackeray, desiring to be more graphic, subsequently changed it to a "wet towel") with which Fielding's head is furnished after a "supper party," and by means of which the "poor fellow" was enabled to "read as stoutly as the soberest man in either of the Temples."¹⁰² All these things are here; for Thackeray, who liked to write "without jumping up every moment to consult somebody,"¹⁰³

¹⁰² *The Times*, September 2, 1840.

¹⁰³ As he told Bayard Taylor.—*Atlantic Monthly*, XIII, 378. Referred to by Dickson, *The North American Review*, CXC VII, p. 531.

willingly accepted all the worst traditions of the man in whose works he now became—to his ultimate profit and success—profoundly interested.

Here we have the two views of Fielding which battled for the mastery in the anonymous *Times* article of 1840—before Thackeray had written *Vanity Fair* and had thereby divided the known literary world with his rival, Dickens. Eleven years later, when he delivered his lectures on the "Humourists" at Willis's Rooms, his prestige was so great and his eloquence so concretely overpowering that whatever he might choose to say of Henry Fielding took precedence over every other account of him that had ever been given. Consequently the great question of the years 1840-1851, as we see it in retrospect, was, Which would prevail in Thackeray's mind, Fielding the Prodigal or Fielding the Supreme Artist?

Meanwhile the old stories continued to flourish, though the author of *Tom Jones* had his admirers and defenders. Hartley Coleridge, sharing his father's enthusiasm for Fielding, asserted that Shakespeare never, and Fielding "very seldom" falls "into a passion with his bad characters"¹⁰⁴—a remark which (incorporated in Roscoe's essay) Thackeray probably had in mind in one of the *dicta* we have just quoted. John Forster in his *Life of Goldsmith* referred to Johnson's clock-work comparison as the "most astounding" of all the Doctor's "heresies";¹⁰⁵ and though afterwards he thought that Fielding's characters (like those of Dickens) sometimes remained mere types, he stoutly defended him as a moralist. Novelists long since forgotten—as for example, W. Y. Browne, in *The Village Tale*¹⁰⁶—occasionally turned Fielding to account in their productions; and Schlosser, whose *History of the Eighteenth Century* (translated by Davison) was reviewed in the

¹⁰⁴ Hartley Coleridge's *The Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford*, London and New York, new ed., 1869, p. xlv.

¹⁰⁵ John Forster's *Life . . . of . . . Goldsmith*, second ed., London, 1854, II, 19 *note*.

¹⁰⁶ Browne, W. Y., *The Village Tale*, London, 1850, Preface. See also his *Fun, Poetry, and Pathos*, London, 1850, p. 254.

*Westminster*¹⁰⁷ for September, 1845, definitely awarded the palm to Fielding, whose popularity in Germany was much delayed, he said, by the sentimental craze for which Richardson was responsible. These are a few of the pro-Fielding documents which may have passed under Thackeray's eyes during this period; yet he probably saw more frequently such references to Fielding the Libertine and Vulgarian as were transcribed earlier in this chapter. And, as time went on, his vanity was no doubt tickled by the prayer of thankfulness heard repeatedly that his own works, which so much resembled Fielding's, were free from that writer's impurities. One allusion which certainly did not escape him was the celebrated outburst on the part of Miss Charlotte Brontë in the second edition of *Jane Eyre*. Disgusted by the Fielding-Thackeray comparisons which followed the publication of *Vanity Fair*, she exclaimed: "They say he is like Fielding: they talk of his wit, humour, comic powers. He resembles Fielding as an eagle does a vulture: Fielding could stoop on carrion, but Thackeray never does."¹⁰⁸ One can imagine her horror when, sometime later, a *Quarterly* reviewer made a comparison between her own Rochester and Fielding's Squire Western!¹⁰⁹ Did her "eagle" smile when he read it? Turning the pages of *Blackwood's* a few months before, Thackeray may have nodded assent when he read (in the dialogue between Aquilius and the Curate) of Fielding's "admirable English"; for he once made the remark that his own English would have been better had he read Fielding before he was ten. Did he agree with the critic when, farther along, he speaks of the author's lack of "high principle and personal dignity?"¹¹⁰ But a really important article that presumably came to his attention was one by E. P. Whipple

¹⁰⁷ *The Westminster Review*, XLIV, 100-102. See Davison's translation of Schlosser's *History of the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1844, II, 59-60.

¹⁰⁸ Preface to second ed., December 21, 1847.

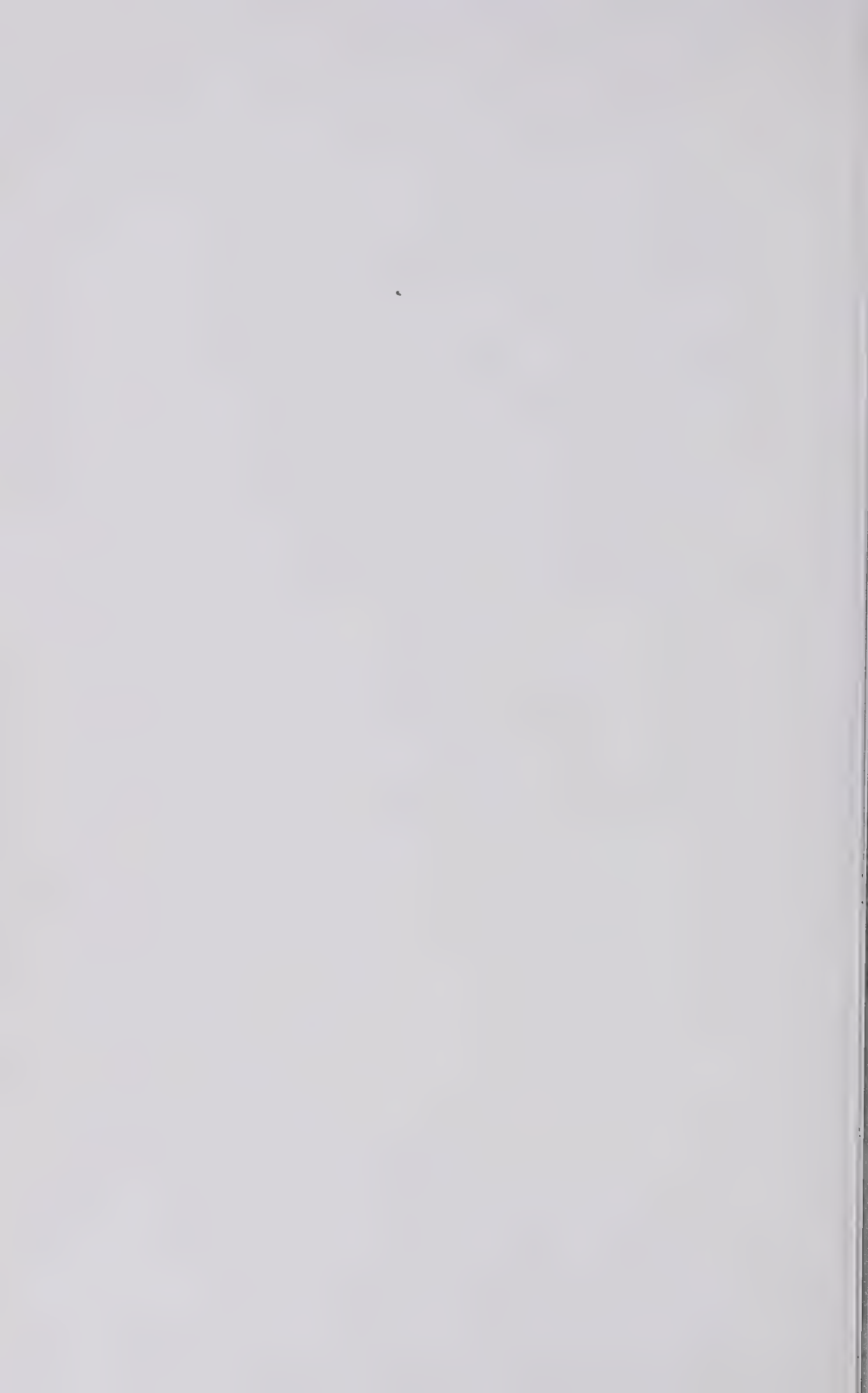
¹⁰⁹ *The Quarterly Review*, LXXXIV, 164. The famous article by Miss Rigby.

¹¹⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine*, LXIV, 466, 469 (October, 1848).



le jeune homme m'offre la main

SQUIRE WESTERN AND SOPHIA
(*Tom Jones*, Book VII, Chapter III)



(whose account of *Vanity Fair* had appeared during the preceding autumn) in *The North American Review* for January, 1849, which, like his own in the *Times* nine years before, was ostensibly a review of one of the editions of Roscoe.¹¹¹ Whipple was, in his way, an enthusiastic and not unintelligent critic of Fielding's novels. In *Amelia*, it is true, which he says is not much read, he finds, with Murphy, a "decay of vigor"; but in *Tom Jones* he experiences the greatest delight. He speaks in particular of that "beautiful art, so felicitously concealed as to seem instinctive," with which "incident grows out of incident, at once springing from and developing character," and with which "the stream of events [Murphy's figure again], growing broader with every accession, flows naturally toward the catastrophe." But Whipple's critical way was far from being the right way. Amazed "at the weight and range" of Fielding's mind: at "its steady, deep, and refined perception of the motives of action"; at its humor, "so shrewd, so profound, so broad, so introversive"—he still accepted the worst that had ever been said about the novelist by previous writers, and pictured him throughout his forty pages as a "confirmed 'rowdy' . . . seemingly as reckless and featherbrained as Tom Fashion, or Sir Harry Wildair." Frankly puzzled at the discrepancy, he made no effort to explain it.

While perusing such notices as these, for or against the creator of *Tom Jones*, what had Thackeray himself been writing of him since the *Times* review in 1840? Was Fielding often in his mind, and was he prospering there? Here are some of the references—enough to show what he was saying from year to year. In 1843, he observes, in *Fraser's Magazine*, that despite the pamphlet on the *Increase of Robbers*, "The History of Mr. Thomas Jones" is "amongst the most valuable of the scientific works of this author."¹¹² In 1844, the year of the appearance of *Barry Lyndon*—that Victorian *Jonathan Wild*—he wrote in another number of the same periodical: "Though the great Doctor Johnson put his peevish protest

¹¹¹ *The North American Review*, LXVIII, 41-81.

¹¹² *Fraser's Magazine*, XXVIII, 362.

against the fame" of Fielding, "and voted him 'a dull dog, sir . . . a low fellow,' yet somehow Harry Fielding has survived . . . and Parson Adams is at this minute as real a character, as much loved by us as the old doctor himself."¹¹³ And in June, 1845, he said of "Her Majesty's Bal Poudré": "If WILL HOGARTH and HARRY FIELDING could . . . witness the scene . . . 'Good Lord! . . . what a satire they could make between them!'"¹¹⁴ In the *Fraser's* for April, 1846, oddly enough, he professes to discover Fielding's hand in the children's book *Tom Hickathrift*, the style of which, he says, is "very like that of the author of *Joseph Andrews*"; for "If any body but Harry Fielding can write of a battle in this way, it is a pity we have not more" of the productions "of the author."¹¹⁵ In January, 1847, he observes that "The works of the real humourist," such as Cervantes, Shakespeare, or "dear Harry Fielding," have always, for their "best characteristic," *Love*—the "Amor and Crown" of Chaucer's prioress;¹¹⁶ and, during the same year, the study of the novels of his favorite "humourist" came to fruition in the opening numbers of *Vanity Fair*, which, according to Mr. Dickson, owes to Fielding a great measure of its success. In 1848, Thackeray again turned his attention to his beloved *Amelia*, though he made, at the same time, some uncomplimentary remarks about her literary father. "I have just got two new novels from the library by Mr. Fielding," runs his letter to Mrs. Brookfield: "the one is *Amelia*, the most delightful portrait of a woman that surely ever was painted; the other is *Joseph Andrews*, which gives me no particular pleasure, for it is both coarse and careless, and the author makes an absurd brag of his two-penny learning."¹¹⁷ In a speech delivered in 1849, Thackeray declared that "our friends Parson Adams and Dr. Primrose

¹¹³ *Fraser's Magazine*, XXIX, 168.

¹¹⁴ See *Punch* for June 7, 1845; and M. H. Spielmann's *Hitherto Unidentified Contributions*, New York and London, 1900, p. 137-138.

¹¹⁵ *Fraser's Magazine*, XXXIII, 497, 499.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, XXXV, 125.

¹¹⁷ *Scribner's Magazine*, I, 396 (April, 1887).

are characters as authentic as Dr. Sacheverell or Dr. Warburton."¹¹⁸ Finally, in the preface to Vol. II of *Pendennis* (November 26, 1850), appeared that famous passage which reads: "Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper." Seven months later to a day, Thackeray was to deliver his celebrated lecture on Fielding. What would he say of the man whose works had become so much a part of his life and thought? Would he change the estimate he made in 1840?

¹¹⁸ Blanchard Jerrold's *The Best of all Good Company*, first series, Boston, 1878, p. 173.

CHAPTER XIV

The Victorian Age

PART II

Thackeray and His Influence

1851-1871

IT was a great occasion, that 26th of June, 1851, when literary London rolled up before Willis's Rooms to hear the brilliant author of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* assess the life and works of that eighteenth-century novelist whose art, as the audience knew, he had taken as his model. At least it was a great day for William Thackeray; for Fielding it afterwards proved to be, on several counts, one of the worst of all the many evil days in that unfortunate man's ill-starred career. Mingled with the most eloquent eulogy that had ever been pronounced upon Fielding, was the most damaging obloquy,—delivered, to use the words of a recent critic, in a tone of "sorrowful patronage." The course was gotten up merely to provide a competence for his daughters; and there would be no harm, the lecturer thought, in deepening the lights and shadows of the portraits of his *Humourists*. Moreover, from past experience, he knew the audience that he must cater to. Had he not said in *Pendennis*, the previous winter, "Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art"? Would not his hearers be shocked if he gave them unmixed praise of the man about whose name so much scandal had collected? And surely here, if ever, was a chance for graphic presentation. Since the obscure *Times* review (even before) hardly a year had passed that Thackeray had not in the form of allusion experimented with thumb-nail sketches of that interesting Artist-Prodigal. Whipple had been admittedly perplexed by the circumstance that the works of so "confirmed a 'rowdy'" could exhibit a "mind" of such depth and range and penetration; an art so intricate, sustained, and beautiful. Thackeray, strange to say,

never seems to have been troubled by the paradox, though as an anonymous reviewer in 1840 he had been much more solicitous to defend Fielding than he was as a star lecturer in 1851. It is instructive to put the review and the lecture side by side—and that will be done presently. But first we should turn to one of those passages in the *Humourists* which no lover of Fielding can read without a glow of pleasure:

“What a wonderful art! what an admirable gift of nature was it by which the author of these tales was endowed, and which enabled him to fix our interest, to awaken our sympathy, to seize upon our credulity, so that we believe in his people—speculate gravely upon their faults or their excellences . . . what a genius! what a vigour! what a bright-eyed intelligence and observation! what a wholesome hatred for meanness and knavery! what a vast sympathy! what a cheerfulness! what a manly relish of life! what a love of human kind! what a poet is here!—watching, meditating, brooding, creating! What multitudes of truths has that man left behind him! What generations he has taught to laugh wisely and fairly! What scholars he has formed and accustomed to the exercise of thoughtful humour and the manly play of wit! What a courage he had! What a dauntless and constant cheerfulness of intellect, that burned bright and steady through all the storms of his life, and never deserted its last wreck! It is wonderful to think of the pains and misery which the man suffered; the pressure of want, illness, remorse which he endured; and that the writer was neither malignant nor melancholy, his view of truth never warped, and his generous human kindness never surrendered.” Was ever novelist so praised before?

Then there is that golden paragraph on Fielding’s character—a passage so eloquent that, like the famous praise of Gibbon, it has arrested the attention of everyone whose eye has fallen upon it: “Wine-stained¹ as you see him, and worn by care and dissipation, that man retains some of the most precious and

¹ From the first edition, London, 1853. “Wine-stained” afterwards became simply “Stained.”

splendid human qualities and endowments. He has an admirable natural love of truth, the keenest instinctive antipathy to hypocrisy, the happiest satirical gift of laughing it to scorn. His wit is wonderfully wise and detective; it flashes upon a rogue and lightens up a rascal like a policeman's lantern. He is one of the manliest and kindest of human beings: in the midst of all his imperfections, he respects female innocence and infantine tenderness, as you would suppose such a great-hearted, courageous soul would respect and care for them. He could not be so brave, generous, and truth-telling as he is, were he not infinitely merciful, pitiful, and tender. He will give any man his purse—he can't help kindness and profusion. He may have low tastes, but not a mean mind; he admires with all his heart good and virtuous men, stoops to no flattery, bears no rancour, disdains all disloyal arts, does his public duty uprightly, is fondly loved by his family, and dies at his work."

But the Fielding who appeared in these two splendid passages was—in the popular mind at least—borne down and overwhelmed by that other picture—the picture of Fielding the Prodigal—which was by far the dominant presentment of the novelist throughout the lecture. Letting his fancy have free rein, Thackeray worked over the review he had written eleven years before, altering it here and there, and at times coloring it more richly to please his Mid-Victorian audience. In 1840, he could say, anonymously, "Let us, then, not accuse Fielding of immorality. . . . Fielding's men and Hogarth's are Dickens's and Cruikshank's, drawn with ten times more skill and force, only the latter . . . dare not talk" of what "the elder discussed honestly." "Here lies the chief immorality of Fielding, as we take it." In 1851, "I can't say but that I think . . . that the great humourist's moral sense was blunted² by his life, and that here, in Art and Ethics, there is a great error." In 1840, "Tom Jones sins, and his faults are described with a curious accuracy, but then follows the repentance . . . and that surely is moral and touching." In 1851, "He would

² This he took from Scott, who, in turn, got it from Mrs. Barbauld and John Aikin.

not rob a church, but that is all." "I am angry with" that "odious broad-backed Mr. Jones," with his "flawed reputation"; he "can't pay his landlady, and is obliged to let his honour out to hire"; and "is not half punished enough before the great prize of fortune and love falls to his share." In 1840, "Vice is never to be mistaken for virtue in Fielding's honest downright books; it goes by its name, and invariably gets its punishment"; there are "no flashy excuses like those which Sheridan puts forward" for "those brilliant blackguards who are the chief characters of his comedies." In 1851, "A pretty long argument may be debated, as to" whether Jones or Blifil, Charles or Joseph Surface is "the worst member of society," and "the most deserving of censure."

Now when anyone is in doubt as to which is really the worse member of society, Jones or Blifil, he strikes not only at the thesis of *Tom Jones*, but at one of the fundamental notions of the science of ethics. The mediaeval Dante³ would have classified Jones and Blifil in a moment; by him the circle of malignant hypocrisy was placed far below that of the follies of youth. But we need not pursue here the question of the relative gravity of human sins; the fact is that in 1840 Thackeray accepted Fielding's thesis and that in 1851 he repudiated it. If Thackeray could have stopped with a misinterpretation of the ethics of Fielding's greatest novel, matters would not have been so bad. But he was not content to stop there; the *argumentum ad hominem* was strong in him. Why should Fielding make so great an error? The answer was obvious: "the great humourist's moral sense was blunted by his life." As we have seen, the idea of a dissolute Fielding had flourished in the Early-Victorian mind. To his lecture Thackeray brought no research and, indeed, very little reflection; he simply played up by means of concrete visualizing the prevailing ideas. For his portrait of Fielding the Man the old stories of the malicious Walpole and of the sneering Lady Mary furnished the colors. In 1840, Thackeray had repudiated Walpole: it was

³ As Professor Raleigh points out, in *The English Novel*, London, 1894, p. 175.

"little Walpole, with his thin shanks and weak stomach," sniggering with "his countesses"; in 1851, it was, "as Walpole tells us only too truly," as Walpole "quite honestly" says. Much as he praised Fielding's "wise and detective" wit, which "flashes upon a rogue" like "a policeman's lantern," Thackeray could not get Walpole's story out of his mind; in confirmation of it was that ugly Lady Bellaston incident—Fielding, therefore, was guilty of "low tastes." Nor could he get free from Lady Mary's story of Fielding's improvidence and dissipation. He assumed that Fielding was "himself the hero of his books": he was "wild Tom Jones"; he was "wild Captain Booth." "Amelia," he wrote, "pleads for her reckless kindly old father, Harry Fielding." He, too, will plead for him, but he "cannot offer or hope to make a hero" of him.

How Thackeray manipulated his materials for the purposes of a popular lecture is obvious enough in other sections of his address. He makes a great point, for instance, of Fielding's choice of "heroes." "If that theory be—and I have no doubt it is—the right and safe one, that human nature is always pleased with the spectacle of innocence rescued by fidelity, purity, and courage; I suppose that of the heroes of Fielding's three novels, we should like honest Joseph Andrews the best, and Captain Booth the second, and Tom Jones the third." Farther along in the lecture, we find a clearer statement of the matter. "If it is right," says Thackeray, "to have a hero, whom we may admire, let us . . . take care that he is admirable." Applying this standard to Fielding's novels, Thackeray finds Joseph entirely admirable, and therefore to be admired most; Booth, not very admirable, indeed, but saved by his repentance; Tom Jones, not admirable at all, his "claim to heroic rank" being utterly "untenable." Did Thackeray believe in his *hero* standard, or was it only an artistic device? As the result of the application of this scheme, Fielding's earliest novel, according to the Thackeray of 1851, should occupy the first place in public favor. "Joseph Andrews," runs the lecture, "though he wears Lady Booby's cast-off livery, is, I think, to the full as polite as Tom Jones in his fustian-suit, or Cap-

tain Booth in regimentals. . . . The accounts of Joseph's bravery and good qualities; his voice, too musical to halloo to the dogs; his bravery in riding races for the gentlemen of the county, and his constancy in refusing bribes and temptation, have something affecting in their *naïveté* and freshness, and prepossess one in favour of that handsome young hero. The rustic bloom of Fanny, and the delightful simplicity of Parson Adams are described with a friendliness which wins the reader of their story; we part with them with more regret than from Booth and Jones." Did Thackeray mean this? In his "Review," in 1840, he had barely mentioned the novel; and in 1848, as we have remarked, he had stigmatized the book as both "coarse and careless" and as giving him "no particular pleasure." Since we know from his "Review," from his letters, and from the lecture itself that *Amelia* was always his favorite, why should he invent a scheme by which we should like honest Joseph Andrews best, while the really great character of Parson Adams was restricted to a phrase five words long? Was not the *hero* standard simply a literary contrivance? Did it not give him a chance to berate Booth and administer a terrible tongue-lashing to Tom Jones? In 1840, Thackeray had found the "key to the philosophy" of *Amelia* in Fielding's own words. "The nature of man," cries honest Dr. Harrison, 'is far from being in itself evil; it abounds with benevolence and charity, and pity, coveting praise and honour, and shunning shame and disgrace. Bad education, bad habits, and bad customs debauch our nature, and drive it headlong into vice.'" "The author's tale," commented Thackeray, "is an exemplification of this text. Poor Booth's habits and customs are bad indeed but who can deny the benevolence, and charity, and pity, of this simple and kindly being? His vices even, if we may say so, are those of a man; there is nothing morbid or mawkish in any of Fielding's heroes." But in 1851 it was necessary to accent his "hero" differently. "You rascal!" he exclaims, turning upon poor Booth, "you own humbly that you are no better than you should be; you never for one moment pretend that you are anything but a miserable weak-minded rogue!" And

when he has brought both Jones and Booth to their knees, suing for mercy; and has asserted that these two "miserable" wretches are Fielding himself; and has confessed—pausing, and lowering his voice—that he "cannot offer or hope to make a hero of Harry Fielding"—is not the whole histrionic procedure clear to probation?

An "achievement in*portraiture . . . delightful as literature but wholly disloyal to letters"⁴—declared W. E. Henley of the lecture (in 1903); and the justness of this criticism has become, as the years have passed, increasingly apparent. "No one," as Mr. Dickson rightly observed in 1913, "has said so many fine things" of Fielding, and "said them so glowingly"; yet no one "save Thackeray, has said so many harsh things . . . with such convincement."⁵ "By his little fabrications and subtle interplay between Tom Jones, his author, and himself," wrote Professor Cross in 1918, "Thackeray really did more than any other man has ever done to stain the memory of Fielding. For art's sake he sacrificed the artist."⁶ Long after the music of Thackeray's eloquent passages has died away, the visual image of the "claret stains" on Fielding's "tarnished laced coat" remains ineradicably fixed in the mind. For many a year no one who ever looked into that rogue's gallery of *Humourists* could conceive of the author of *Tom Jones* as other than a wastrel and a libertine—no one, that is, except Thomas Keightley, whose articles in 1858 remain to be discussed. The novelist's biographer, Frederick Lawrence, who published his *Life* in 1855, was almost as much in accord with Thackeray as was the herd of reviewers who had never investigated a single item in the career of Henry Fielding.

Even in the years between the *Times* article in 1840 and the lecture in 1851, Thackeray, as we have seen, had disported himself as he pleased with the legendary figure of his great

⁴ From Henley's "Essay," in Fielding's *Works*, London, 1903, XVI, vi.

⁵ *The North American Review*, CXCVII, 537.

⁶ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 225.

master. And after his *Humourists* was received with so much applause, Fielding became to him, for the remaining years of his career, an actual Child of Fancy, to be scolded, and apologized for, and adored, all in the same breath. Space is lacking even for an enumeration of the references which have come down to us in his books, his letters, and his conversation. When, in 1852, a new London club was formed, at which, according to one of its members, a certain "liveliness . . . after midnight" (not permitted at the solemn "Garrick") was to be allowed, Thackeray chose for the name of the new organization, "The Fielding";⁷ and, naturally enough, his eighteenth-century story, *Henry Esmond*, finished during the same year, was not lacking in references to that historian "who will give our children a much better idea" of "the present age in England, than the *Court Gazette*," that jovial fellow "who for fun and humour seemed to top them all."⁸ While he was in America, he kept Fielding to the fore not only in the regular discourse on the *Humourists* but in an additional lecture which he gave in New York, as well as in his conversation everywhere—reciting on one memorable occasion "to a small circle" (among whom was G. W. Curtis) "Gibbon's splendid panegyric on the author of 'Tom Jones.'"⁹ It was a great pleasure to him, he wrote Mrs. Brookfield, January 23, 1853, to find that the Americans "read our books as if we were Fielding."¹⁰ In the additional lecture—on "Charity and Humour"—he confessed that there was in Fielding a "lax morality in many a vital point," though he praised the "hearty sympathy and benevolence" of that "erring but noble creature."¹¹ In the December number of *Harper's Magazine* (1853) his American admirers might read that celebrated denunciation of Fielding on the part of Colonel Newcome; and,

⁷ Edmund Yates's *Recollections*, London, 1884, I, 235-236.

⁸ *Henry Esmond*, Book I, preliminary chapter; Book III, ch. v.

⁹ J. G. Wilson's *Thackeray in the United States*, New York, 1909, I, 47.

¹⁰ *A Collection of Letters*, New York, 1888, p. 213.

¹¹ *Harper's Magazine*, VII, 86 (June, 1853).

during the following year, when it appeared in book form, everyone on both sides of the water knew the story. In his lectures on the "Four Georges" (1855) he made the statement (presumably thinking of the Walpole anecdote) that "to Fielding even, a lord was a lord"¹²—as though the author of *Jonathan Wild* were a toady! And still later Fielding played a considerable part in supplying a true Georgian *milieu* for *The Virginians*—as may be seen from numerous references.¹³ During Thackeray's last years, Fielding did journalistic duty again in various "Roundabout Papers" (1860-1861).¹⁴ Very few women, we are told, in July, 1860, enjoy "the banter of Swift and Fielding"; and in November, apropos of inns, we learn that Fielding "constantly" speaks of them in his writings, and describes "the dinner quite honestly." In the December number the author of the *Humourists* bursts forth in the old vein, upholding Hawkins and Hurd and "Dandy Walpole" in their scornful attitude, and indignantly exclaiming—with "Dandy Walpole's" libel in mind—"There was no reason why . . . Fielding and Steele should sponge upon their friends." As late as September, 1861, we find him sneering at "the blushing modesty of Fielding." Thus for nearly a quarter of a century—taking all the references together—not a year had passed, perhaps, in which Thackeray had not put in print some recognition or reprobation of the man whom he acknowledged as his master and at whose expense he derived both fame and profit. No one can doubt that he genuinely admired the works of Fielding; and yet—outside of the lecture itself—the most graphic bit of writing he ever did about him was Colonel Newcome's onslaught upon those very works.

"Tom Jones," sir; "Joseph Andrews!" sir, he cried, twirling his mustachios. "I read them when I was a boy, when I kept other bad company, and did other low and disgraceful things, of which I'm ashamed now. . . . As for that Tom Jones—that fellow that sells

¹² "George the Third."

¹³ *The Virginians*, first ed., London, 1858, I, 175, 206, 207, 219, 254, 322; II, 113, 180.

¹⁴ *The Cornhill Magazine*, II, 125, 632, 759; IV, 381.

himself, sir—by heavens, my blood boils when I think of him! I wouldn't sit down in the same room with such a fellow, sir. If he came in at that door, I would say, "How dare you, you hireling ruffian. . . . How dare you, you degraded villain!"¹⁵

This passage it was, as much as any, presumably, which did the business for the great man whom Thackeray on so many occasions delighted to honor.

To quote Professor Cross: "Fielding, as Thackeray portrayed him, was a profligate, a spendthrift, a heavy drinker, in youth noisy and quarrelsome over his cups, and the associate of loose women. . . . It is taken as a matter of course that he was a gambler."¹⁶ "Thackeray was tireless," writes Mr. Dickson,¹⁷ "in conjuring up pictures of the profligacy of Henry Fielding, clothing them in sparkling phrases and sending them forth to injurious result. With naught but the imagination to guide or restrain, he shows Fielding, even in the latter years of his life, 'in a watch or sponging home [house], fuddled most likely,' or 'in his tavern chair carousing with Heaven knows whom,' 'ready for a row, or a bottle, or what you please,' 'a young fellow upon town with very loose morals indeed, and never seems to have any thought of anything beyond the pleasure of living and being jolly.' 'If he led a sad, riotous life, and mixed with many a bad woman in his time, his heart was pure as he knew a good one when he found her.' Now all this is pure assumption, mere romancing, and if *any* of it is intended to apply to aught but his youthful days it is distinctly untrue." How Thackeray disdaining research built up fancy pictures of Fielding's profligacy, how he falsified the character of Tom Jones, how he transferred to Fielding the vices he had invented for Jones—all these things are ably set forth in Mr. Dickson's article, which is so well supported by evidence that no one should have any further question about the matter. "Others before Thackeray wrote of Fielding, and

¹⁵ *The Newcomes*, London, 1854, I, 38, 39 (ch. iv).

¹⁶ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 217-218.

¹⁷ *The North American Review*, CXCVII, 524, 537.

wrote as he did," says Mr. Dickson, "but the difference is that Thackeray's views count and count for much, while those others count for little, or count not at all." When Thackeray said of Fielding: "His muse had sung the loudest in tavern choruses, had seen the daylight streaming in over thousands of emptied bowls, and reeled home to chambers on the shoulders of the watchman"—who could withhold belief? And so it was with other vivid scenes in which Thackeray depicted Fielding: not only in his tavern chair but in jail; in the theatre, carrying on with the Oldfields and Bracegirdles; off the stage, playing the rôle of Jones or Booth; drunken, gaming, libertine, remorseful for his sins—how real it all was! Almost as real (and hardly less fictitious) as the story of Fred Bayham or of Captain Costigan, not only to his readers but to the author himself.

And surely no man ever had a more appreciative audience than Thackeray had on that rare day in June. His caricature of Swift was questioned even at the time: "Kill him again, Mr. Thackeray!" jibed one of his critics. But his caricature of Fielding was practically unchallenged; if anything, he was thought to have written *con amore*. How different was the attitude toward Fielding of Thackeray's audience in 1851 from that of the groups addressed by Coleridge and Hazlitt earlier in the century! It is interesting to recall some of the literary persons who attended this course of lectures. There was Mrs. Carlyle, who had written in 1843 that *Amelia*—the novel so much beloved by Thackeray—was "a dreadful bore";¹⁸ and there was Carlyle himself, who, as we have observed, was fearful of the "loose" "morality" of Fielding's novels, and implied that they were not what he would call "REALITIES." There was Monckton Milnes (afterward Lord Houghton), who subsequently in one of his poems characterized the lecturer as "Fielding—without the manners' dross";¹⁹ and there was Harriet Martineau, whose opinion has

¹⁸ *New Letters . . . of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, London, 1903, I, 125.

¹⁹ *The Poetical Works of . . . Lord Houghton*, Boston, 1876, I, 303; originally in *The Cornhill Magazine*, IX, 133 (February, 1864).

thus been given by James Payn. "Miss Martineau once confessed to me," he writes, "that she could see no beauties in 'Tom Jones.' 'Of course,' she said, 'the coarseness disgusts me, but apart from that, I see no sort of merit in it.' 'What?' I replied, 'no humour, no knowledge of human life?' 'No; to me it is a wearisome book.'"²⁰ But no celebrity whose report on the lecture has been recorded in literary history was so violent against the author of *Tom Jones* as Thackeray's great admirer, Miss Charlotte Brontë.

Back in 1847, two days after she had inserted her "carrion" simile in the Dedication (to her "eagle") of the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, she continued her scolding in a private letter. "Mr. Lewes," she wrote (December 23), must "not bring" Thackeray "down to the level of Fielding—he is far, far above Fielding. It appears to me that Fielding's style is arid, and his views of life and human nature coarse, compared with Thackeray's."²¹ A week or two later, she expostulated with Lewes himself. "What induced you to say," she asks, "that you would have rather written *Pride and Prejudice* or *Tom Jones*, than any of the *Waverley* novels?"²² She was, in fact, so wrought up over the matter that three years later when she heard the celebrated lecture she wrote Sydney Dobell, "On the theme of Fielding—he put forth his great strength—and though I could not agree, I was forced to admire."²³ In April, 1853, after the *Humourists* had appeared in print, she "threw herself warmly" into a discussion that took place at Mrs. Gaskell's (in Manchester) concerning Thackeray's treatment²⁴ of Fielding; and in the following month, still very much agi-

²⁰ Payn, James, *Some Private Views*, London, 1881, p. 45.

²¹ Shorter, C., *The Brontës*, London, 1908, I, 377-378.

²² *Ibid.*, I, 387 (January 12, 1848). Subsequently Lewes admitted that "there are heights and depths in human nature Miss Austen has never scaled or fathomed." "Such a novel as 'Tom Jones' . . . we shall not get from a woman."—*The Westminster Review*, LVIII, 133, 134.

²³ *The Life of Sydney Dobell*, edited by "E. J.," London, 1878, I,

221.

²⁴ Shorter, C., *The Brontës*, II, 323.

tated, she wrote to Mrs. Gaskell as follows: "I was present at the Fielding lecture: the hour spent in listening to it was a painful hour. That Thackeray was wrong in his way of treating Fielding's character and vices my conscience told me. . . . Had Thackeray owned a son, grown or growing up, and a son brilliant but reckless—would he have spoken in that light way of courses that lead to disgrace and the grave? . . . Had I a brother yet living [Here is the root of the matter, for her brother died an inebriate.], I should tremble to let him read Thackeray's lecture on Fielding. I should hide it away from him."²⁵ Something may be said, to be sure, in justification of Miss Brontë's alarm; for the bibulous creature that Thackeray discoursed about was, in his fondness for liquor, almost another Branwell Brontë. But even before this letter to Mrs. Gaskell, Miss Brontë had discovered other dangerous propensities in Fielding and had sought the counsel of her editor, George Smith. "Mr. Thackeray's worship of his . . . false god of a Fielding," she writes, "is a thing I greatly desire to consider deliberately." "In the cynical prominence of the under-jaw, one reads the man. It was the stamp of one who would never see his neighbours (especially his women neighbours) as they *are*, but as they *might* be under the worst circumstances."²⁶ When Charlotte Brontë, in that celebrated "disputation" about Fielding, spoke "her mind out," she seemed to Thackeray like "an austere little Joan of Arc marching in upon us, and rebuking . . . our easy morals."²⁷

Had Miss Brontë read her Fielding more carefully, she would have had less cause for alarm. Obviously her notion of Tom Jones was derived not so much from the novel itself as from the lecture; and how different Thackeray's hero was from Fielding's, Mr. Dickson and Professor Cross have

²⁵ Shorter, C., *The Brontës*, II, 325-326.

²⁶ Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, edited by Shorter, London, 1900, p. 565 *note*.

²⁷ Thackeray's "The Last Sketch," in *The Cornhill Magazine*, I, 486-487 (April, 1860).

shown.²⁸ Thackeray laments Tom's "fondness for drink and play"; yet only in his joy at Allworthy's recovery did he go beyond the bounds in the matter of wine; and no "fondness" for drink is recorded of him at any time. Nor did he gamble. It was Booth who lost his money at cards; or, to come nearer home, Thackeray himself, who, as Professor Cross has pointed out, "dissipated a fortune of £20,000, the last remnant of which, some £1,500, was transferred to the pocket of a gambler at Spa." Tom, as Thackeray depicted him, bore little resemblance to the one Fielding created. He was not a strapping, "broad-backed" fellow with "large calves," but a strongly-built young man of medium size. As a writer at the beginning of the century has said—Robert Bisset, whom we have previously quoted—"Tom Jones was overtopped" by the six-foot man. Nor was Sophia's "drawing-room"—so far as we can learn from Fielding—ever "tainted" by that "young gentleman's tobacco pipe";²⁹ for neither there nor anywhere else did his creator represent him as smoking. When Thackeray put on the finishing stroke by declaring that the "wild Tom Jones" he had thus fabricated was Fielding himself, no wonder Miss Brontë, on studying the portrait of the novelist, discovered in certain lineaments a vast propensity for evil.

As we have observed, Thackeray was not the first to misrepresent Fielding and his "heroes." Among the Mid-Victorians the procedure had become a fad. Only a few years before Thackeray's lecture, *The British Quarterly Review* (1845) had characterized Tom Jones as a "gambler" and a "drunkard," and—oblivious of that hero's talk with Young Nightingale—had stigmatized him as "the unprincipled seducer of wives and virgins."³⁰ We cannot be surprised, therefore, to find that Thackeray's Tom Jones and Thackeray's Fielding—in many respects, one and the same person—were received with an applause that was practically unanimous. If the portrait he

²⁸ *The North American Review*, CXCVII, 522-537; and Cross's *Fielding*, III, 218-225.

²⁹ Cross, III, 224.

³⁰ *The British Quarterly Review*, II, 532.

painted was at all at fault, it was because it was too flattering. Nassau Senior in the *Edinburgh*—entirely without suspicion—found it a delight “to read Mr. Thackeray’s bold and cordial and discriminating praise of this great, but, we fear, somewhat neglected artist.”³¹ Lawrence, Fielding’s biographer, who should have known better, considers that Mr. Thackeray, “with a thorough appreciation of the excellences of the man, and with a large compassion for his errors,” has given an “exquisite portraiture.”³² *The North British Review* (1855) quotes Thackeray’s “I cannot hope to make a hero of Harry Fielding” with entire approbation.³³ William C. Roscoe (1856), a professed champion of Fielding, who wrote a special article on Thackeray’s misrepresentation of Swift, declares that Thackeray has made of Fielding his “*beau ideal*.”³⁴ Jeaffreson (1858)³⁵ is “very deeply indebted” to Mr. Thackeray “for instruction.” Masson, in his *British Novelists* (1859), expands Thackeray’s “claret stains” into “club-dinners and claret,” and shows us a Fielding “roughing it never so manfully”³⁶ with his female companions. And a certain Robert Demans, in *Prose Writers of Great Britain* (1860), improving on a passage in Thackeray, believes that the “frequent occurrence of scenes of the grossest licentiousness” in Fielding’s works was due to the author’s own “profligate and dissolute life.” It is not too much to say that Thackeray’s “no hero” picture of Fielding went practically unchallenged by his contemporaries; the only quarrel they had with him was that he was too lenient.

Since criticism was in such a state that even before the *Humourists* appeared Fielding could be characterized as a “rowdy,” it is not to be wondered at that after the powerful Thackeray had given *his* sanction to such exercises of the fancy, lesser writers, scorning all restraints, indulged in unbe-

³¹ *The Edinburgh Review*, XCIX, 243 (January, 1854).

³² *Life of Henry Fielding*, p. 357.

³³ *The North British Review*, XXIV, 216.

³⁴ Roscoe, W. C., *Poems and Essays*, London, 1860, II, 275.

³⁵ Jeaffreson, J. C., *Novels and Novelists*, London, 1858, I, 105.

³⁶ *The British Novelists*, 1859, pp. 103-104.

lievable orgies of the imagination. As time went on, the condition of affairs grew worse rather than better; but in the following "Literary Portrait" by George Gilfillan—Presbyterian preacher, literary man of all work, and critic of no small prominence in those days—the coloring may be regarded as sufficiently vivid. Far as Thackeray was pleased to venture in his strictures on *Tom Jones*, the rhapsodical Gilfillan so completely outdistanced him as to declare that he had overrated the book "amazingly." Partly from a "depraved taste," partly from "carelessness," according to this reverend gentleman, Fielding—a "sad scamp" even "for that age"—simply "transferred his own character to his novels"; so "polluted" had his mind become that he desired to make his readers "as wicked and miserable" as himself. For a peroration to his sermon Gilfillan prognosticates that *Joseph Andrews* will "alone" survive to preserve Fielding's name; for *Amelia*, less corrupt than its great predecessor, is "coarse," "poor," and "tedious"; while *Tom Jones* itself, though a piece "of admirable art," is like a "palace built of dung."⁸⁷ This "Portrait" of Fielding must have given great pleasure to Ruskin (if not also to Carlyle). Ruskin, who in 1840, as we have seen, conceived of the author of *Tom Jones* as a "hungry dog" licking his chops over "ordure," went so far in 1873 as to deny the novelist the power of character-drawing because of an alleged "fimetic"⁸⁸ or dunghill taint. Objectors to the morality of Fielding's works have never been lacking; but it was reserved for the Mid-Victorians to compare *Tom Jones* to a dunghill.

There is, however, another side to the story of Thackeray's influence on Fielding's fame, some details of which are now in order. For several years before those eloquent passages in the *Humourists* became, in the published volume (1853), common property, their distinguished author had been characterized by the reviewers as a follower in Fielding's art; and by

⁸⁷ Gilfillan, George, *A Third Gallery of Portraits*, Edinburgh and London, 1854, pp. 274-275.

⁸⁸ Ruskin's *Works*, Cook and Wedderburn edition, London, XXVII, 630.

his famous *dictum* in the foreword to the second volume of *Pendennis* (1850) he was felt to have made a public acknowledgment of the relationship. From the publication of the *Humourists* until the end of his career he kept to the fore, in various ways, the fact that he was the disciple of Henry Fielding the Novelist as well as the Apologist for Henry Fielding the Roué. Consequently his influence was strongly operative in stimulating interest in the works of his literary father; and his golden praise of his master's art—echoed far down the century—was a considerable item in swelling the “man's account.” Look where we may in the reviews we find such passages as the following, in which the names of master and pupil appear side by side. “There are, as it seems to us,” wrote J. F. Kirk,³⁹ in *The North American Review*, “but three English novelists,—Fielding, Jane Austen, and Thackeray,—who both reveal the springs of action, and exhibit its outward aspects and local peculiarities; whose characters are types of classes, and in whose works we find reflected various phases of human nature as well as of English life.” Kirk has “no hesitation in putting Fielding at the head” of the list. Thackeray and Fielding, declared *The North British Review*, two years later, are “the two greatest painters of human nature, as it actually is, that we have ever had, Shakespeare alone excepted . . . we should hesitate before we placed any” novels “higher than ‘Amelia’ and ‘Esmond.’”⁴⁰ *The Edinburgh*,⁴¹ reviewing Thackeray's *Virginians*, has this to say: “There is one point in which Fielding is a model for all times, and in which Mr. Thackeray is his worthy disciple, and we venture to think, perfectly his equal. That point is, style and beauty of composition. . . . You may open any page of Fielding at random, and read it with pleasure, without reference to the story or context, merely as a piece of exquisite writing. The same may be said of Mr. Thackeray.” Any novelist who wishes “to please greatly and live long,” should study Fielding's “art in narra-

³⁹ *The North American Review*, LXXVII, 200 (July, 1853).

⁴⁰ *The North British Review*, XXIV, 201 (November, 1855).

⁴¹ *The Edinburgh Review*, CX, 452 (October, 1859).

tive, description, and dialogue, and those beautiful miniature essays, perfect in form as crystals, in which the sentiment of his novels is here and there condensed." Few, of course, of the articles were so favorable to Fielding as these just cited; but in those days a discussion of Thackeray very frequently involved a comparison between him and the man whom he had chosen as his model.

Another service which Thackeray performed for Fielding is one which has received, perhaps, comparatively little attention—his insistence upon the superiority of the works of his favorite author over those of Smollett and Richardson. As a matter of fact, neither of Fielding's celebrated contemporaries was esteemed by the Mid-Victorians as he had been in the days of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt. The popularity of Smollett, to begin with, which had previously been considerable—when he numbered so many followers—had been greatly damaged by his imitator, Dickens. "Smollett and Fielding," wrote Jeaffreson in 1858, "have always been in vague criticism placed side by side, and held to resemble each other. It would however be difficult to say in what this similitude consists. . . . Fielding with all the other merits [which the writer enumerates] had the *gentleness* of a truly great nature."⁴² And a *Quarterly* reviewer during the same year declares that Smollett has "now been surpassed in richness of humour by Mr. Dickens, who in this particular has never had an equal." "The superiority, as regards literary art," he continues, is "indubitably Fielding's. His, as Mr. Thackeray says, is the 'greater hand,' the hand at once of more vigorous sinew and of finer tact and cunning. In style, too, Fielding is the more classical, clear, and finished."⁴³ As early as 1840 Thackeray had made up his mind about Smollett; for in his *Paris Sketch Book* he stated that *Roderick Random* was "inferior" to *Pickwick*, while *Tom Jones* was "immeasurably superior."⁴⁴ And in his

⁴² Jeaffreson, J. C., *Novels and Novelists*, London, 1858, I, 165, 169.

⁴³ *The Quarterly Review*, CIII, 105 note, 96 (January, 1858).

⁴⁴ "On Some French Fashionable Novels," in *The Paris Sketch Book*, second ed., London, 1840, I, 173.

Humourists, though praising *Humphry Clinker*, he declared, probably with Scott in mind, that Smollett "did not invent much." Though Smollett and Fielding were still placed "side by side" for a long while after Thackeray's lecture, it is clear that the difference in stature between them was growing more apparent. Gilfillan the Scot was in the minority when he protested against Thackeray's treatment of his countryman.

As for Richardson, there is ample evidence that Thackeray's disparagement of him touched a responsive chord in popular opinion. This does not mean that Richardson lacked defenders—particularly among the writers of text-books. And occasionally in the periodicals we come across such a passage as the following, which appeared in *The Westminster Review* for October, 1853. "We may doubt" Richardson's judgment "in unveiling scenes of vice which the pure need never witness in real life," says the writer, "but never are these scenes made to pander to the evil passions of human nature." And of Fielding: "What an impression his novels leave of low sentiment, coarse habits, and the prevalence of gross vice everywhere. . . . No great author of our time, least of all Mr. Thackeray, *could* write like either Fielding or Smollett; and the work would not be tolerated were it attempted." Fielding's Amelia, asserted this critic, "loves her husband rather better than she did before on discovering his infidelity."⁴⁵ But despite a certain number of articles of this sort, the drift against Richardson is clearly visible. "Richardson," declared *The North British Review* (November, 1855), "saw nothing" in *Tom Jones* "but vulgarity and immorality"; and, "in the meantime," Fielding's "books have been translated into almost every European language." *The Athenaeum* announced (November 10, 1855) that "For our own parts, we infinitely prefer charming Sophy Western to Clarissa." "But few," observed the Rev. Whitwell Elwin in *The Quarterly Review* (December, 1855), "now wipe away the dust which has gathered" upon Richardson's "voluminous stories, or else, repelled by the

⁴⁵ *The Westminster Review*, LX, 355, 356.

tedious trivialities and mawkish prosings" they "prematurely close the book." "We rightly think Richardson's *Pamela*, unfit reading," said William C. Roscoe (January, 1856), "on account of its purrulent minute details"; but, "Iago and Blifil leave no stain on the mind."⁴⁶ How times had changed since the days of Mrs. Barbauld is indicated by a remark made by Jeaffreson in his *Novels and Novelists* (1858): "The enthusiastic homage rendered to Richardson, if we do not use all historical aids . . . is altogether incomprehensible."⁴⁷ While Thackeray was restricted by the plan of his *Humourists* from giving any detailed examination of Richardson's novels, his reference to them as "endless volumes of sentimental twaddle," and to their author as "a mollcoddle and a milksop" who had a "sickening antipathy for Harry Fielding" was indubitably effectual. The old Richardson-Fielding antithesis at which Scott struck a blow in 1821, very often, after the *Humourists*, gave place to the much more sensible Thackeray-Fielding analogy.

Another good office which Thackeray performed for Fielding was his "discovery" of *Amelia*. This unfortunate novel, which was, for the most part, neglected during the author's own century, and which was underrated even in the days of Coleridge and Lamb, was, because of its heroine, Thackeray's acknowledged favorite. We have already recorded some of the *dicta* concerning *Amelia* herself: in the *Times* review (1840) he had spoken of Fielding's description of her as the "most beautiful and delicious" that "is to be found in any writer, not excepting Shakespeare." No previous man of letters of Thackeray's standing, had, so far as is known, ever said quite this. In the well-known note to Mrs. Brookfield in 1848, from which we just now quoted, he asserted that *Amelia* was "the most delightful portrait of a woman that surely ever was painted."⁴⁸ Finally, in his lecture (1851), his enthusiasm

⁴⁶ Roscoe, W. C., *Poems and Essays*, London, 1860, II, 301, 302.

⁴⁷ *Novels and Novelists*, I, 136.

⁴⁸ Mrs. Brookfield wrote (October 17, 1850) to her husband, "Mr. T. told me you had said I was like Fielding's *Amelia*, which he said

found more complete expression in the following passage: "To have invented that character is not only a triumph of art, but it is a good action. They say it was in his own home that Fielding knew her and loved her: and from his own wife that he drew the most charming character in English fiction. Fiction! why fiction? why not history? I know Amelia just as well as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu." The propulsive force of this criticism can easily be imagined; never since Thackeray's day has Amelia receded to that despised position which she occupied in the mind of Mrs. Barbauld, the blue-stocking, who, declaring that Fielding sought to degrade his female characters, refused her admittance to her *British Novelists* (1810). Thackeray's service in bringing this delightful woman into greater prominence should not be minimized; for to know the real Fielding one must know Amelia.

In a number of ways, then, Thackeray's influence upon the fame of Fielding was undeniably for good; and it is only fair to remark that in the lurid accounts of Fielding the Profligate which followed the publication of Thackeray's lecture there was—to use the words of one of the elder novelist's defamers—"a considerable admixture of nobler matter." Particularly was this the case when the reviews appeared of Frederick Lawrence's *Life of Fielding* in 1855, a book which now demands our attention. The author of this work was a young barrister who for several years had been employed as a compiler in the British Museum. In view of his training and his desire for accuracy, this biography should have marked a turning-point in the History of Henry Fielding; and at least the writer had good intentions. It was he who first reviewed to some purpose Arthur Murphy's sketchy and inaccurate account of Fielding's life, making a number of much needed corrections; moreover, with the professed intention of rescuing Fielding's fame from its assailants, early and late, he did battle with the Richardsonians of old and with detractors like Phillimore

was a great compliment, but he added, 'I said I did not think you had her strength of character.'"—*Mrs. Brookfield and her Circle*, London, 1905, II, 324.

of his own age. But, following the custom, Lawrence began—and ended—with the conviction that the life of Fielding might serve as a horrible example to the weak and the profligate—a rather unfortunate point of view for a seeker after truth! In his preface he announced that “many instructive lessons may be drawn” from the “chequered and wayward life” of this man; and at the end of the book, after collecting many interesting facts, he had made so little use of them that the best he could do in the way of a general conclusion was, as we have seen, to send his readers to the “exquisite portraiture” by Thackeray. In view of this recommendation, the biographer’s correction of a detail, here and there, could produce little result until someone should appear to supply the proper interpretation of Fielding’s career as a whole. Neither in the original papers (in *Sharpe’s London Magazine*⁴⁹) nor in the completed work does the author betray any animus against the novelist; he quotes with obvious pleasure the passages in which Scott and Coleridge defend the ethics of *Tom Jones*, and he adds to these *dicta* the following excellent observation of his own: “The Blifils of the world are not so easily brought to account as the Joneses. Surrounded by a halo of respectability . . . they generally succeed in deceiving all but the most shrewd observers. He does good service to society who brings them down from their high estate, exposing their windings, turnings, and shufflings, and holding them up to public aversion and contempt.”⁵⁰ But all this counted for little in a biography which was admittedly written to present for the edification of the public the delinquencies of its subject. Lawrence was, furthermore, not only inaccurate but more frequently ill-governed. Whitwell Elwin (who did some inventing on his own account) quoted, in his review for the *Quarterly*, the passage in which Lawrence pictures the first Mrs. Fielding as egging her husband on to even greater folly at East Stour, and remarked, very justly, “As far as we are aware, Mr.

⁴⁹ The five parts appeared in Vol. IV, new series, February, March, April, May, and June, 1854.

⁵⁰ Lawrence’s *Life of Fielding*, p. 260.

Lawrence has no warrant for this censorious description of the conduct of Mrs. Fielding."⁵¹ Then there was the rascally invention that Fielding, driven to extremities, had been a puppet-showman at Bartholomew Fair—a legend which—innocently enough—grew to terrific proportions under the hands of Professor Henry Morley. And although the baseless fabric of this dream was dissipated by the discovery of the *real* showman, Timothy Fielding, much more than a rack was left behind. But the worst thing which Lawrence did was to elaborate the picture of a *remorseful* Fielding, whose *Amelia* was actually written as a penitential offering. It is only fair to say that Lawrence was merely expanding what Thackeray (and some previous writers) had already more than once suggested; but, in this instance, the biographer improved upon the lecturer. Thus the idea of a spendthrift, "claret-stained," and libertine Fielding as seen through the magnifying and distorting lenses of Thackeray's vivid imagination was completely approved by a writer who should have been, and who was in general supposed to be, a reasonably careful investigator.

No account of Lawrence's *Life* appeared in *The Edinburgh Review*; but there were extended articles upon it in the *Quarterly* (by the Rev. Whitwell Elwin), in *The North British Review*, and in *Bentley's Miscellany*. Both the *Quarterly* and *The North British Review* show considerable respect for Fielding's standing as a novelist, and bestow a good deal of praise upon his works, the writer in *The North British Review* being particularly cordial. "It would be as hard to criticise one of Fielding's novels," he says, "as to criticise a fine day—they have so few faults"; nor can one read "any" of them without "a sense of moral invigoration, which is as delightful as it is unlike the result of nearly all other novel reading."⁵² So great, in fact, was the discrepancy between Fielding the Man and Fielding the Novelist as portrayed by Thackeray and Lawrence that the reviewer says, "Few things are more startling than the contrast" between the "tone" of "Fielding's books" and "what

⁵¹ *The Quarterly Review*, XCVIII, 109 note (December, 1855).

⁵² *The North British Review*, XXIV, 203 (November, 1855).

seems to have been the character of Fielding's life," which, indeed, was such as not to inspire "any great admiration." Here was the *crux* of the situation. But Thackeray's eloquence had been confirmed by the researches of Lawrence—what more could be desired? This "startling contrast" was also perceived by the Rev. Whitwell Elwin in *The Quarterly Review*. But even *his* evident appreciation of much that is admirable in Fielding's works did not prevent him from representing their author as even more dissolute than he had found him pictured by Thackeray. Under the clergyman's pen "this man of pleasure, this haunter of taverns" became the "squanderer of thousands"; and Murphy's evening at "a tavern," which was followed by Thackeray's "wet towel," now culminated in "riot."⁵³ To *Bentley's Miscellany*, however, belongs the distinction of elaborating upon Thackeray and Lawrence in the most approved journalistic fashion. "Is it not possible," asks the reviewer, that "Coleridge, and others who have caught up his cry, may have too indiscriminately admired the healthy, bracing atmosphere in which Fielding breathes so *very* freely?

... Harry the heedless might be better than Samuel the serious, and yet be no better than he should be." Lawrence, according to this article, "draws Fielding in the best light, alike as man and as author," and is "ever disposed to palliate" his "transgressions, literary and moral." Then come the regulation stories of Lady Mary and Arthur Murphy, and the remark that France refused to "license Master Tom, because of his immorality." "It is well," runs the comment, "to give proper weight to the weighty objections, on this ground, to which Fielding's novels are one and all liable, and which only their extraordinary merit in other respects" could have kept from "that tendency to decay which, Heaven be praised," is "innate" in "all corrupt matter."⁵⁴

Thackeray's account of Fielding, often grotesquely exag-

⁵³ Elwin's *Some XVIII Century Men of Letters*, London, 1902, II, 100; for the original article, see *The Quarterly Review*, XCVIII, 100-148 (December, 1855).

⁵⁴ *Bentley's Miscellany*, XXXIX (1856), 160, 155, 159.

gerated and frequently shorn of its eloquent praise, found a place thenceforward in publications of all descriptions, only a sample of which can here be given. If we turn to the *Handbook of Biography* (1854) we find in the article by William Spalding, professor of logic at the University of St. Andrews, that Fielding was a "careless," "extravagant," "good-hearted and improvident man of pleasure," whose work as a magistrate "undoubtedly helped to degrade" both his "character and his feelings."⁵⁵ The worthy Allibone, whose *Critical Dictionary of English Literature* began its prosperous career in 1854, proceeds as follows: "How deeply . . . is it to be lamented, that, lacking a high sense of moral responsibility, he [Fielding] delighted chiefly in painting the least refined, least elevated characteristics of his species, and permitted himself to stimulate the passions to the excesses of vice, instead of causing those 'passions to move at the command of virtue!'" Quarreling with both Coleridge and Thackeray, Allibone says of the latter, "We have often listened with pleasure . . . to Mr. Thackeray's moral reflections upon the Lives and Works of the departed great, but we soon found that the summing up of the learned judge leaned not always 'to virtue's side'; and if the literary offender happened to be a three-bottle man, we entertained no apprehensions for his safety."⁵⁶ During the same year, James Hannay, to whom had been entrusted the annotation of the *Humourists*, seems to have gone even farther than Thackeray himself in imagining a *drunken* Tom Jones, though he professes his fondness for Fielding, who is, in his opinion, Thackeray's entire prototype. In one of his lectures on "Satire and Satirists" (1854), Hannay bids us form a picture of the drunken Churchill as a boy "by imagining a Tom Jones with an infusion of Dryden in him." Churchill's moral code, says Hannay (who may have recalled Roscoe's parallel)

⁵⁵ Spalding, William, *Handbook of Biography*, London, 1863 (the preface to the first edition is dated May 10, 1854). See also his *History of English Literature*.

⁵⁶ Allibone, S. A., *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature*, Philadelphia and London, 1859 (copyright, 1854), I, 592.

was the one "exemplified" by Fielding's *Tom Jones* and by Robert Burns,—“the doctrine, namely, that if you are a good-hearted fellow and hate humbug, you may set the respectable moralities at defiance.”⁵⁷ Unless we turn back to Thackeray's lecture it is difficult to understand how Fielding's Tom could have been confused with the bibulous Churchill. Then there was Hugh Miller, who, in his essay on “Our Novel Literature” in 1856, declared that Fielding, “like his hero, *was* a sad scapegrace,” though “curiously enough,” he had a “respect” for “what he deemed religion.”⁵⁸ With David Masson, whose *British Novelists* (1859) was regarded in its own day as a standard work on the subject, Thackeray's “claret stains,” as we have seen, were expanded into “club-dinners and claret” and Fielding himself was a “laughing young scapegrace.” Disagreeing with Coleridge, the learned Scottish biographer (who may have joked “wi’ deeficulty”) insists that Fielding is a mere “humourist,” and—accepting and expanding Johnson's *dictum*—warmly commends Richardson, whose novels, unlike those of the “superficial” Fielding, “stir the mind powerfully.”⁵⁹ In J. C. Jeaffreson's *Novels and Novelists* (1858), Thackeray's view of Fielding was elaborated into an hysterical mixture of praise and blame. Quoting Coleridge, he believes there “are not many people now” (1858) “who would mention Fielding as an immoral writer”; yet he repudiates *Joseph Andrews* as begun in “an insolence of mirth” which no one would “hesitate” to “call immoral.” He takes issue with Johnson, Richardson, and Walpole, and asks why a “Jack Ketch ignominy” should attach to one who was only performing his duty as an “executioner”; but in the same article he speaks of Fielding as “tainted” with the “grossness of his tavern-haunting age”; and, identifying the novelist with Booth, goes on to tell us, in the vein of Thackeray, how Amelia's nobleness had

⁵⁷ *Satire and Satirists*, London, 1854, Lecture IV, p. 191.

⁵⁸ Miller's *Essays*, third ed., Edinburgh, 1869, pp. 467, 468. See also *The Witness*, August 18, 1840.

⁵⁹ Masson's *British Novelists and their Styles*, Cambridge and London, 1859, pp. 104, 101, 117, 118, 121, 136.

"always made him repent" of his "own sad errings" and ask her "forgiveness with manly tears"; and how, as the contrite Fielding wrote about her, "the drops" stole "down" his "cheeks" as his pen went "faster and faster."⁶⁰

Thus, after Lawrence had added his confirmation to the *dicta* of Thackeray, the sinister influence of the old stories continued to grow from year to year in books and periodicals. At the same time, however, the widespread interest in Fielding's works drew forth many an excellent criticism. Among those whose attention was attracted by the discussion was Fitzjames Stephen. In one of his *Cambridge Essays* (1855), he writes: "In what does the superiority of Fielding over Mr. Dickens consist? Is it not in the fact that *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* are *bonâ fide* histories of those persons; whilst *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist* are a series of sketches, of all sorts of things and people, united by various grotesque incidents, and interspersed with projects for setting the world to rights?"⁶¹ Another admirer of Fielding was M. Davenport Hill, the celebrated authority on English criminal law. After reading Elwin's article in *The Quarterly Review*, he wrote (January, 1856): "I heartily concur in your views both as to the excellences and defects of Fielding. He never runs into caricature, although he sometimes advances to its very edge, as in the lamentations of Parson Adams at the absence of his sermon on Vanity." This scene, as Hill acutely observes, is "delayed until the reader has become so well acquainted with the character of Adams as to feel that the extravagance is within the bounds of nature." In his judgment Fielding is "superior" to Smollett not only in "absence of caricature" but also in that "heartly good-nature which beams through" his works. The *Voyage to Lisbon*, he says, is a "perfect model of writing": "Every line is worth a king's ransom." Hill was one of the earliest to point out "that intense love of children"—the power of doing justice to whom is a

⁶⁰ *Novels and Novelists*, I, 91-117.

⁶¹ "The Relation of Novels to Life," in *Cambridge Essays*, London, 1855, p. 149.

"touchstone of genius"—exhibited by Fielding in such scenes as the one in which "Adams's lesson on fortitude is interrupted by the news that his little son . . . is drowned."⁶² Particularly important, as coming from so high an authority, is the following passage from another letter, dated March 27, 1856: "There are but two writers in our language" who ever refer to "law without showing their ignorance on the subject. These are Shakespeare and Fielding. Walter Scott, a lawyer by profession and by office, is no exception."⁶³ This statement, which appeared as a footnote in a book published nearly half a century later, exerted, of course, no influence in its own day; and almost equally obscure was an excellent *obiter dictum* by the historian and essayist J. A. Froude—an observation, by the way, which may have been inspired by a sentence in *The English Humourists*. According to Thackeray, the question was still pending as to which was the "worst member of society," Jones or Blifil. As if directly challenging this statement, Froude casually remarked in *Fraser's Magazine* (February, 1857): "Fielding had no occasion to make Blifil, behind his decent coat, a traitor and a hypocrite. It would have been enough to have coloured him in and out alike in the steady hues of selfishness, afraid of offending the upper powers as he was of offending Allworthy,—not from any love for what was good, but solely because it would be imprudent. . . . Such a Blifil would have answered the novelist's purpose—he would still have been a worse man in the estimation of some of us than Tom Jones."⁶⁴

Thus, occasionally, someone would speak his mind out; but in general Thackeray had things all his own way. Nothing could show this more clearly than the circumstance that the admirable papers on Fielding in *Fraser's Magazine* (1858) by Thomas Keightley made so little impression upon the Fielding legend. For a quarter of a century—that is, until Dobson's

⁶² *The Recorder of Birmingham* . . . By his Daughters Rosamond and Florence Davenport-Hill, London, 1878, pp. 299, 300.

⁶³ *Some XVIII Century Men of Letters*, II, 100 note.

⁶⁴ *Fraser's Magazine*, LV, 128.

Fielding in 1883—they were practically disregarded; not until 1907, when Mr. Dickson reprinted them, did they appear in book form.⁶⁵ In these articles,⁶⁶ Lawrence's biography was given a much-needed overhauling by a competent hand. "It is understood," wrote Mr. Dickson in the preface to his reprint, "that Mr. Keightley used in this review material he had gathered for a life of Fielding, a project which the appearance of Lawrence's book caused him to abandon." To be sure, Lawrence had collected a certain number of facts, but in the face of Thackeray's vivid imaginings he seems to have been powerless to interpret them correctly. To this task Keightley now applied himself; it was a labor of love, for, as he confessed in another place, *Tom Jones* had been his "favourite novel" from "boyhood."⁶⁷ Keightley said of Lawrence: "He fails to make the due use of his materials; he does not always see what was, as it were, before his eyes, he fails to draw inferences, or draws erroneous ones. . . . My object, then, is to do what he has left undone; from his materials and references to make correct statements, and deduce just, or at least probable, conclusions, and if possible to represent Henry Fielding as he really was." An account of the specific contributions made by this excellent investigator may be appropriately deferred until another chapter; for, hidden away as they were in the pages of *Fraser's Magazine*, no one seems to have paid any attention to them in the period we are now considering.

Keightley notwithstanding, that "wild *Tom Jones*" whom Colonel Newcome would not countenance continued on both sides of the water to run his course. Consult, for example, *Harper's Magazine* for August, 1859, and read the "Easy

⁶⁵ *The Life and Writings of Henry Fielding* . . . by Thomas Keightley, edited by F. S. Dickson, Cleveland, 1907.

⁶⁶ *Fraser's Magazine*, Vol. LVII (1858): pp. 1-13 (January); pp. 205-217 (February); pp. 762-763 (June).

⁶⁷ "*Tom Jones*: my favourite novel from my boyhood, which is worth all the sensation-novels that have been or ever will be written. . . . Like Mr. Thackeray, I love 'the old masters.'"—Keightley, T., in *Notes and Queries*, third series, III, 424 (May 30, 1863).

Chair" article. "What kind of gentleman is Tom Jones" or "Captain Booth!" Are Amelia and Sophia "specimens of the finest" character "among women in the last century?" "Is 'Tom Jones,' in any sense, a healthier or more manly history than 'The Newcomes?'" Fielding himself, says the editor, "was a great, lusty, loose, rollicking" fellow who had "wonderful perception"—where "he saw at all"; who "hated humbug"—where "he could see humbug."⁶⁸ Apparently some, at least, of the readers of the "Easy Chair" must have remonstrated, for in the following February, the editor, George William Curtis, by the way, tried to make amends for the severity of the previous article.⁶⁹ "Certainly no young man nor young woman can now be advised to read 'Amelia' or 'Tom Jones,'" he writes, "but neither can they to read any of Richardson's stories, who does not suffer under the ban of impropriety; and certainly Fielding is a thousand-fold preferable to most of the French novels" which it is now the "fashion to read." We call Fielding "hard names, but there are great witnesses for him"—Gibbon, Coleridge, Thackeray, and Lady Mary—even "Talfourd, who was sure to be morally alarmed upon the smallest occasion." "Fielding is coarse, but not immoral." He "never sins against the noble sentiments and humane instincts." His "cheerful, robust, sensible mind stood between the supercilious Cavalier and the sanctimonious Puritan. Beyond doubt he called Richardson 'Sammy,' and dashed off his parody of Pamela with infinite gusto. For that very reason forgive and respect this sinewy genius which fought against extremes . . . remembering the sympathy, the charity, the sweet wit, the affluent imagination, the good sense, and the human heart, let us leave Fielding lying there by Chaucer, and plant rosemary for remembrance upon his grave." Contradictory accounts like these in the same periodical—the logical consequence of Thackeray's Lecture—represent the kind of writing most in vogue at this time; still, in the majority of the reviews, as we have observed, Fielding was allowed superiority

⁶⁸ *Harper's Magazine*, XIX, 414.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XX, 413, 414.

as a constructive artist. In *Blackwood's Magazine* for March, 1860, however, even this leaf of the laurel was denied him. The article in question may be characterized as one of the most root-and-branch denunciations of Fielding and all his works in which any Mid-Victorian periodical of high standing had yet indulged. The writer attacks in general the "nonsense which is current" about Fielding's greatness, and in particular calls Thackeray to account for his over-praise. "We find it impossible," runs the review, "to ascribe a profound knowledge of human nature to one so utterly without seriousness [as Fielding], so ludicrously incompetent to portray any of the deeper emotional and intellectual forms of life." "It is difficult to suppose him [Thackeray] serious in attributing poetical and philosophical genius to the author of *Tom Jones*; difficult to imagine what can be meant by the 'truths' that writer has left." The reviewer challenges Thackeray to take down *Tom Jones* and "look into it for the evidence of poetry, sympathy, and insight." Fielding's humor was only a "cheap humour"—its main staple being, if you please, a "bloody nose" or "the discovery of two persons breaking the seventh commandment"; while the much-vaunted "construction" of *Tom Jones* we "have proved" not to exist. In short, "we must burn our pens, and abdicate the judgment-seat altogether, if we are to pronounce" Fielding to be "a great artist, or a great painter of human nature."⁷⁰ Thackeray himself—for his reputation as a critic had been attacked—replied as follows in a "Roundabout Paper": "Why, did not a wiseacre in *Blackwood's Magazine* lately fall foul of *Tom Jones*? O hypocritic! So, to be sure, did good old Mr. Richardson, who could write novels himself—but you, and I, and Mr. Gibbon, my dear sir, agree in giving our respect, and wonder, and admiration, to the brave old master."⁷¹

And so the sixth decade of the century dawned inauspiciously for Henry Fielding; Keightley's articles in *Fraser's Magazine* had as yet utterly failed in their mission. As always,

⁷⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine*, LXXXVII, 331-341.

⁷¹ *The Cornhill Magazine*, II, 124 (July, 1860).

Fielding was not without defenders; but very few of them, comparatively, were among the most prominent men of letters of the time. It is only necessary to look back to the days of Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Byron to observe the change that had taken place. Nothing—at least nothing that has been recorded in literary history—has come to us from Browning, who, on making the acquaintance of Balzac in the 'Forties, "bade the completest adieu"⁷² to English fiction. Tennyson, as we infer from Fitzgerald, was a Richardsonian: "I like," said he, "those great *still books*,"⁷³ but of Fielding there is never a word.⁷⁴ And Fitzgerald himself—though once or twice an expression of approval escaped him regarding Fielding—was so thoroughly a Richardsonian that he projected an abridgment of *Clarissa*. The statement has been made that Fitzgerald was a great admirer of Fielding; but the author of *Tom Jones* was not, in the long run, a prime favorite with him. In 1867, in a letter to Pollock, he says, "I have been reading Thackeray's Novels a third time: I am sure that Fielding is common and coarse work in Comparison." By 1879 he had found even Thackeray "too melancholy and saturnine" for one who was "old enough to prefer the sunny side of the wall." And in 1881, two years before his death, the interpreter of the romantic and sentimental Omar was more firmly convinced than ever that "Miss Austen, George Eliot and Co. have not yet quite extinguished" Sir Walter.⁷⁵ Matthew Ar-

⁷² *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett*, 1899, II, 107 (April 27, 1846).

⁷³ See *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, by his son, London, 1898, II, 372; also Fitzgerald's *Letters . . . to Fanny Kemble* (London, 1895, p. 138) in which the phrase reads, "large, *still*, Books."

⁷⁴ Jane Austen was much more to Tennyson's liking. "Alfred . . . spoke of Jane Austen, as James Spedding does, as next to Shakespeare!" *Autobiography of Henry Taylor*, London, 1885, II, 193. Scott he regarded as "the most chivalrous figure of this century, and the author of the widest range since Shakespeare."—*Alfred Lord Tennyson*, II, 371.

⁷⁵ *More Letters of Edward Fitzgerald*, London, 1902, pp. 84, 216, 259. On a lovely day in May, 1841, he mentions as one of the causes

nold, now coming into prominence, who could write at length about Tolstoi, has left us no essay or celebrated *dictum* on Fielding; nor do we find any mention of his works in those lists of books which, from year to year, Arnold set himself to read. Sterne, presumably, was more to his taste. Of Carlyle and Ruskin we have already spoken. For the most enthusiastic comments on Fielding we must look lower rather than higher; as a matter of fact, comparatively few printed notices about him of any length are to be found during this period except those which occur in articles on other subjects.

One of the themes which involved a certain amount of attention to Fielding was the popularity which, after *Adam Bede* (1859), was enjoyed by George Eliot. In 1861, according to *The Westminster Review*, the volumes of Fielding and Johnson were fast gathering dust on the library shelves,⁷⁶ while Lady Mary was no longer a household name. No doubt there is truth in this statement; for the eighteenth century was then, for the most part, either neglected or misinterpreted, and the day of the critical study of the novel by careful men of letters was still far in the distance. Even in the 'Sixties, however, reviewers occasionally used the works of Fielding as a criterion for judging, not always to their advantage, the new productions of George Eliot. *The Quarterly Review* for October, 1860, was ill-natured enough, in an account of her work up to that time, to suggest that Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith, and Scott were never guilty of making their readers "groan under their dullness." And six years later Henry Lancaster, one of the best-known reviewers of the day, went so far as to say: "We do not, of course, compare her with such masterpieces of art as *Tom Jones*, or with the easy grace of Miss Austen; she does not reach even to the careless coherence of

of his contentment that he has "had Fielding to read, while smoking in the garden."—*Ibid.*, p. 14. And once when he tired of Jane Austen he wished that one of Fielding's "Brutes" would "dash in upon the Gentility and swear a round Oath or two!"—*Letters of Edward Fitzgerald*, London, 1907, II, 131.

⁷⁶ *The Westminster Review*, LXXVII, 375.

Scott"⁷⁷—while as for "morality" the Lady Bellaston incident is less obnoxious than that of Hetty Sorrel.

A more enthusiastic admirer of Fielding than Lancaster was that delightful writer with whom he at times collaborated—Dr. John Brown. "I have been reading for the first time these 36 years *Tom Jones*, with great interest," writes the author of *Rab and his Friends* to Lady Airlie in 1864. "It's a man's book, coarse and rough, but full of human nature, sense and genius, the mere writing, the plot and the wit, perfect. But we are all so changed now, for better *and* worse, that these books, like the dress and manners of their times, must become obsolete. Still, I hope Fielding will long remain a classic."⁷⁸ This hope he lived to see realized; and in 1882, the last year of his life, he exclaimed: "I was reading *Tom Jones* the other night, with great admiration and comfort. What manliness! what a style! the introductions delicious."⁷⁹ To the testimony of Dr. John Brown should here be added that of another literary man, Charles Reade, who very early in his career became acquainted with Fielding's novels. In a "mighty dull" vacation while at college he read *Tom Jones*, as well as some of the works of Smollett and Sterne. "One can't," he says, "pick up a 'Peregrine Pickle' and 'Tom Jones' every day in the week."⁸⁰ Of his *Griffith Gaunt* (1866), he wrote, "In this tale I have to deal, as an artist and a scholar, with the very period Henry Fielding has described—to the satisfaction of Prurient Prudes; a period in which manners and speech were somewhat blunter than now-a-days."⁸¹

Three years before the publication of *Griffith Gaunt*, Thackeray had passed away, and comparisons between his work and that of the "brave old Master" were again in order. But when we contrast the articles at the close of Thackeray's

⁷⁷ *The North British Review*, XLV, 208, 223 (September, 1866).

⁷⁸ *Letters of Dr. John Brown*, London, 1907, p. 179.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁸⁰ Coleman, John, *Charles Reade as I Knew Him*, London, 1903,

p. 37.

⁸¹ Reade, Charles, *Readiana*, London, 1883, p. 316.

career with those which had appeared at the beginning—Nassau Senior's, for example—we perceive a distinct change in attitude. Critics now dwelt more frequently than before upon the superiority of contemporary novelists over Fielding in respect to "moral tone," and congratulated the age on "finding a writer who could expose its weaknesses and lash its vices, without ever penning a word that could offend the taste of the most fastidious."⁸² In fact, the periodical from which this passage is taken was not entirely at ease concerning the "religious tendencies" of Mr. Thackeray himself; while *Adam Bede*, in the reviewer's opinion, had been "judged with extraordinary leniency"—sentiments which were occasionally shared by other magazines than the pious *London Quarterly*. But the account which most pleased the periodical world was one by Walter Bagehot, who compared the "musing fancifulness" of Thackeray with the utter lack of any such quality in Fielding. Bagehot, relying upon Lady Mary (whose works he reviewed), conceived of Fielding as "a reckless enjoyer," who "saw the world,—wealth and glory, the best dinner and the worst dinner, the gilded *salon* and the low spunging-house,—and he saw that they were good."⁸³ This passage from Bagehot has been rightly called by Professor Saintsbury in a recent book one "of the most curious ineptitudes."⁸⁴ Certainly no one who was capable of writing the ironic *Jonathan Wild*, or of planning the architectural *Tom Jones*, or who was accustomed when *in extremis* to solace himself with the philosophic wisdom of Cicero and Plato, could be fitly characterized even in spite of an indomitable cheerfulness under *peine forte et dure* as the "reckless enjoyer" which to the followers of Thackeray he usually appeared.

After perusing *The English Humourists*, even sober compilers lost their sobriety and grew imaginative. In the *History of English Literature* by W. F. Collier we have the follow-

⁸² *The London Quarterly Review*, XXII, 390 (July, 1864).

⁸³ *Literary Studies*, London, 1879, II, 144; originally in *The National Review*, April, 1864, pp. 552-553.

⁸⁴ Saintsbury's *The Peace of the Augustans*, London, 1916, p. 128.

ing picture: "Mingled with the delighted murmur of praise and congratulation which welcomed Richardson's 'Pamela,' there rang a mocking laugh from the crowd of scamps and fast men, who ran riot in London streets, beating the feeble old watchmen, and frightening timid wayfarers out of their 'wits. To such men virtue was a jest; and among the loudest laughers was a careless, good-humoured, very clever lawyer . . . called Henry Fielding . . . that mad wag . . . [published] a wicked mockery of those virtuous lessons which the respectable printer of Salisbury Court had endeavoured to inculcate by his first book." "Everything is pelted about, and everybody beats everybody else, until the noisy crowd is hustled off the stage, and the scene or chapter ends."⁸⁵ "I know no writer," wrote William Forsyth in his *Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century* (1871), "more likely than Thackeray to have given unqualified praise to 'Tom Jones.' . . . But what does he say about Fielding's hero? I am glad to quote the passage, for it shows Thackeray's sound sense and right feeling." Then follows the excerpt in which Thackeray was "angry with Jones," etc. For his part, Forsyth is unable to read Coleridge's celebrated defense "without amazement." "We cannot but regret," declares this critic, "that the coarseness of the age, and his own natural instincts, led Fielding to choose for the hero of his novel a young libertine."⁸⁶ Page after page, Forsyth goes on with his tirade—certainly few criticisms have borne a more prolific harvest than the derogatory parts of Thackeray's eloquence.

But the acme of misinterpretation was reserved for the brilliant Frenchman, H. A. Taine, whose *History of English Literature* was welcomed by *The Westminster Review* as unrivaled for "trustworthiness of statement!"⁸⁷ Taine had looked into Murphy's "Essay," and had found in Lawrence's

⁸⁵ W. F. Collier's *History of English Literature*, Edinburgh and New York, 1865, pp. 311, 314.

⁸⁶ William Forsyth's *Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1871, 258-273.

⁸⁷ *The Westminster Review*, LXXXI, 512 (April, 1864).

Life the passage from Sir John Hawkins; but the authority upon which he leaned most heavily, it would seem, was no other than his contemporary, Thackeray, though—as Fielding was not to the Frenchman's taste—he left out of his account the *good* parts of the celebrated lecture. Translated in 1871, Taine's *English Literature*, because of its brilliancy of style and despite its gross caricature, became naturalized almost immediately. It is significant that the translator, undoubtedly with the author's consent, incorporated as footnotes more or less of the material which had been assembled by the fanatical Forsyth, of whose work a few samples have just been given. After telling his readers that Richardson's first novel is nothing less than a "flower," and that Pamela herself is an "artless" child, the great Taine next attempts a portrait of Fielding. He is "a drinker," "a roysterer," "bespattered, but always jolly"; he is "careless, and has not even literary vanity"; with him "virtue is but an instinct," the goodness of a horse or a dog; his works are an "abundant harvest" in which he has "forgotten the flowers," a "rough wine," which "wants nothing but bouquet." In reading him you "are only aware of the impetuosity of the senses, the upwelling of the blood." Man, as Fielding conceives him, is "a good buffalo; and perhaps he is the hero required" by a people which calls itself "John Bull."⁸⁸ It was not only Taine's authority but his actual cleverness which gave tremendous force to this animated cartoon of his. "We will go along with Fielding," he wrote, "smiling by the way, with a broken head and a bellyful." Did not the suspicion dawn upon him that this brawler whom he thus accompanied was a master of irony? In the "rough wine" of Fielding's adventures did he fail to detect the "bouquet" of a distinguished style? These are idle questions. Taine had made up his mind that all Englishmen lacked the "*exaltation nerveuse*"; to carry out his picture of coarseness and brutality he victimized Fielding with many another. When the author of

⁸⁸ Taine, H. A., *History of English Literature*, translated by Van Laun, 1871, II, 176.

Jonathan Wild, whose irony, to adopt a figure of Walter Besant's, was of the temper of Damascus steel, could be mistaken for an "amiable buffalo" the time had come for a thorough and long-delayed correction of a very bad astigmatism.

CHAPTER XV

The Victorian Age

PART III

Beginning of the Reaction

1871-1882

THUS, as we have observed, the Dionysiac progress of the convivial Fielding was absolutely unimpeded by the efforts of the careful Keightley in 1858; moreover, as we shall see in the present chapter, which brings our history down to the time of Dobson (1883), this bibulous rascal, this "Mohock" of Thackeray's imagination, was still to play many a scurvy trick on the critics of the great novels. In the 'Seventies, however, there are unmistakable signs of a quickening and deepening interest in the life and literature of the previous century; consequently we find, mingled with preposterous accounts of the man and his works, a number of excellent criticisms written by those who are somewhat unwilling to accept the Fielding legend in its entirety. To Thomas Keightley, the historian, rather than to any other man belongs the credit of being the earliest competent investigator who examined the myths that gathered about the author of *Tom Jones*. The results of these researches may properly be given in the words of Professor Cross: "Keightley was the first to cast doubt on the Fielding pedigree . . . and on the story of a fortune dissipated at East Stour, which has likewise been shown to be utterly false. A rough estimate which he made of Fielding's probable income from his plays should have put to rest forever the tales of the young dramatist's abject poverty and the anecdotes of his sponging upon his friends for a dinner. He set in their correct light the remarks of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu about Fielding's improvidence and the report which Horace Walpole circulated of Fielding's debased associates while a justice of the peace. On the latter count, he

had but to give the names of the principal persons whom Fielding was entertaining at his table when Rigby broke in upon the magistrate. . . . 'Jonathan Wild,' which had often been cited as evidence of Fielding's depraved tastes, Keightley rightly described as a scathing political satire aimed specifically at Sir Robert Walpole. Against 'the malicious assertion' of Richardson, repeated by Lawrence, that the first Mrs. Fielding was illegitimate, he set the tradition of Salisbury that she belonged to a 'highly respectable' family and the praise lavished by all who knew her upon her character. Lawrence's cruel insinuation that Fielding neglected this charming woman and was perhaps unfaithful to her, he treated with the contempt it deserved. 'Amelia,' far from breaking Fielding's heart . . . as a reviewer of Lawrence had surmised, Keightley averred must have been written in a mood where no remorse was, where love and admiration for remembered worth and beauty predominated over all other emotions. Though Keightley accepted the tradition of Fielding's dissipation in youth, he gave him a clean score on all other counts. Similarly he vindicated Tom Jones against all the vices that had been fabricated against this boy. If vice be a habit, as the moralists say, Keightley could discern none in Tom. 'He did not drink, swear, lie, cheat, game, oppress, malign, &c.' This is doubtless an overstatement; but Tom had none of the deep-seated vices. . . . They did not penetrate and vitiate the character of the young gentleman."¹

Here, epitomized in three magazine articles, were materials (from the life of Fielding that Keightley "meditated"² but never wrote) which might have formed the basis for a new biographical sketch of the novelist; and a good opportunity for writing such a sketch presented itself in 1871, when Dr. James P. Browne of Edinburgh brought out a new edition of Fielding's works. This excellent chance, however, was neglected; except for a critique on Fielding's writings, Browne contented himself with a reprint of Murphy's "Essay," thereby

¹ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 237-238.

² Dobson's *Fielding*, "Prefatory Note," 1883.

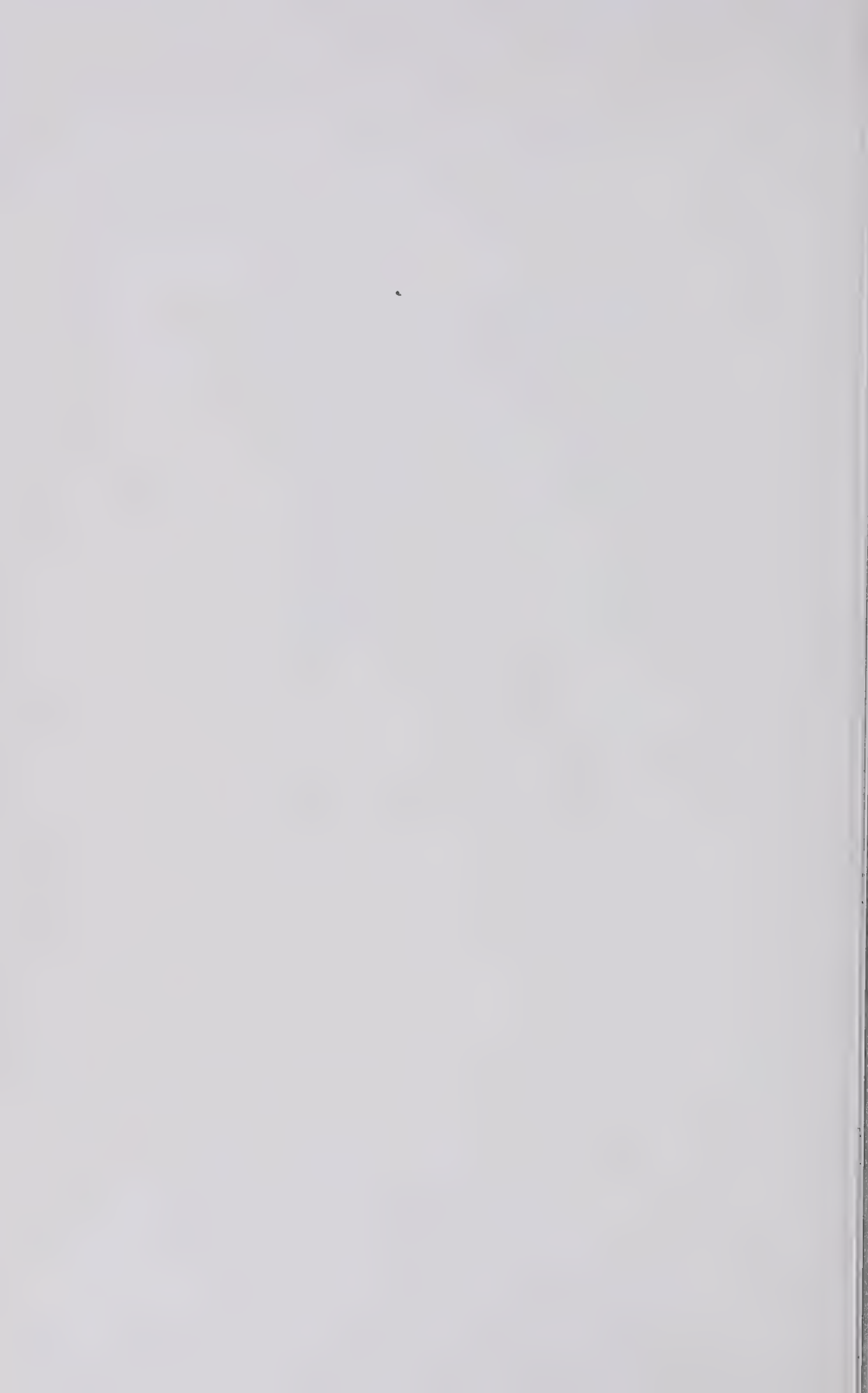
starting that iniquitous performance on a new and flourishing career. Certainly few authors have ever been more unfortunate than Fielding in the matter of editors: Murphy, Watson, Mrs. Barbauld, Mudford, Scott, Roscoe—and now, the unknown Browne, whose criticisms, despite much that was pertinent and seasonable, were written in such an involved and tasteless style that nothing ever came of them. Finely gotten up as the edition was, no review of it appeared in the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, *Blackwood's*, the *Westminster*, or *Fraser's Magazine*.

Yet the new editor's intentions were most commendable. It was he who made the first notable protest against Thackeray in which that writer was called by name—for even Keightley had taken pains to direct his artillery at Lawrence, and, in another place, had quoted the author of the *Humourists* with approbation. Browne came out in the open. In answer to the charge that there was still a question as to which was the worse member of society—Jones or Blifil, he replied: "Surely, it is not presumptuous to say that this opinion of Thackeray's is palpably groundless. Can revengeful malignity and sanctimonious hypocrisy be placed in the same category with unselfish generosity; especially when that noble quality is exhibited in its various phases?" In regard to Thackeray's characterization of Sophia as "a fond, foolish palpitating little creature," he asks, "Is this the proper inference to draw from Sophia's dialogue with Allworthy, where she emphatically tells him that she can never give her consent to the good man's proposal of her marriage with Jones; and where we find that she is also deaf to the entreaty of Jones himself, the man she loves so dearly; even though his addresses were then sanctioned by her fond, but despotic father?" Of the attack on poor Tom himself Browne says, "Though Jones was possessed of high animal spirits and manly courage, there is nothing in his conduct and manners which sanctions the appropriateness" of Thackeray's "disparaging epithets." On the contrary, "his conversations with Mr. Allworthy respecting Blifil evince the presence of the most generous and forgiving temper, as well



*Tom eut à peine le temps et la
force de le soutenir dans ses bras.*

THE STATUE COMES TO LIFE
(*Tom Jones*, Book XIII, Chapter XI)



as a judgment at once ripe and benevolently considerate. Surely, a character, endowed with such high qualities, and so entirely unselfish, ought not to be thus deprecated and almost ignored, because of the immoral course into which such a character was, for a while, drawn by the allurements of womankind."

Not only did Browne champion Fielding against Thackeray but he devoted a good part of the preface to a vindication of him as a serious and exceptionally acute moralist. Fielding, he says, was possessed of a "talent of philosophic discrimination in regard to the instinctive motives of human conduct, which even a profound metaphysician might have cause to envy"; and he declares that "no one, unless blinded by angry prejudice, can fail to discern that the spirit which actuated him as an author was an ardent wish to see his fellow-creatures, both high and low, honest, beneficent, and happy."³ Again, in a preface to the *Miscellanies*, which came out during the following year (1872), Browne called attention to that democratic spirit in Fielding which had previously been so little noticed. To support his assertions he drew largely upon passages in the author's poetry, quoting, for example, from "True Greatness" the lines:

To no profession, party, place confined,
True greatness lies but in the noble mind;

and from the poem on "Liberty" the exclamation:

Curse on all laws which liberty subdue,
And make the *many* wretched to the *few*.

In conclusion, he declares that "the spirit of true philosophy formed a copious ingredient of Fielding's genius," and that he possessed this spirit "because the rare perspicuousness of his intellect was illumined, in a superior measure by the sentiments of justice and mercy."⁴ Long-winded and tedious as his

³ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, edited by James P. Browne, M.D., new ed., London, 1871, I, vii, ix.

⁴ Fielding's *Miscellanies and Poems*, edited by J. P. Browne, M.D., London, 1872, pp. xiv, xv, xvii.

introductions undoubtedly are, Browne should be commended not only for his fearless protest against the caricature of Tom Jones made popular by Thackeray but for his desire to build up a conception of Fielding himself from the novelist's own works rather than from the malicious stories of his enemies. Even Lamb and Hazlitt and Coleridge, enthusiastic as they often were, did not care to entrench and support their views by an examination of Fielding's development as a fiction-writer or by a consideration of his relation to the times in which he lived. Dr. Browne, then, an unknown Edinburgh physician, who from a chronological survey of the works was impressed by Fielding's insistence upon the democratic idea and upon the true spirit of the Christian religion, looks distinctly forward to the new era of scientific investigation.

Two years later, another protest against Thackeray's view was voiced by the popular essayist George Barnett Smith, whose *Poets and Novelists*⁵ has escaped oblivion so far as to find its way into "Everyman's Library." Knowing nothing of Fielding's life, Smith falls into a series of biographical absurdities which culminate in the assertion that the distressed author tried to borrow money even of Doctor Johnson! Nor has the essay very much critical value except in one particular—at a time when the Thackeray-Taine caricature was having its own way, Smith's article was one of the few reactionary documents which had so far appeared. To Thackeray he says, Fielding "never intended to depict a perfect hero; he would have shuddered at the thought." And against Taine's charge of lack of refinement, he pointed out some of the flowers that the great Frenchman had ignored—the eloquence with which Sophia was ushered in; and, indeed, the character of Sophia herself, one of "the purest, sweetest, and most attractive in literature."

Despite all strictures, Thackeray's own admiration for Fielding's art cannot be questioned; but the consequences of

⁵ The paper on Fielding originally appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*, XXX, 1-18 (May, 1874).

his misrepresentations of that writer and that writer's "heroes" were nothing short of deplorable. If Fielding really was the "creature" that Thackeray depicted, the popular inference was that his novels could be little better than the man who wrote them. The extent to which this fallacy was carried is now almost unbelievable. Two characteristic specimens of this procedure may be given—one from the text-books, the other from the periodicals. On "heroes like Tom Jones," says Henry Coppée, in his *Manual of English Literature* (1872), "our verdict may be best given in the words of Thackeray": then follows the inevitable "I am angry" with Jones, etc., and after that the following assessment of the novel itself. The plot of *Tom Jones* is "rambling, without method: most of the scenes lie in the country or in obscure English towns; the meetings are as theatrical as stage encounters; the episodes are awkwardly introduced, and disfigure the unity; the classical introductions and invocations are absurd. His heroes are men of generous impulses but dissolute lives, and his women are either vile, or the puppets of circumstance." And this is what G. P. Lathrop, an American critic of no little repute in his own day, was able to write of Fielding in *The Atlantic Monthly* for June, 1874. How strong must have been the current idea of the novelist's artistic *insouciance*! Fielding, he declares, was "content to offer the results of . . . [his] observation in a crude, digressive form, somewhat lacking . . . in principle"; and the main cause to which he attributes this ramshackle construction is, that the author wrote as much for his own amusement as for that of the reader, "chatting garrulously" when "the mood took him." Surely garrulosity is the last term in the world to apply to the "literary providence" of Fielding! "These shortcomings," continues this amazing article, "withheld from him the possibility of grouping his keen observations firmly about some centre of steady and assimilative thought. With Fielding, nothing crystallized, but all was put together in a somewhat hastily gathered bundle"; in Lathrop's opinion, the creator of *Tom Jones* "hardly dreamed of that suggestive

and deeply significant order of novel"⁶ which was produced by George Eliot.

It is gratifying to know that George Eliot herself had a higher regard for Fielding than the critic who eulogized her. Was she familiar with the list of books which her Auguste Comte, the positivist, recommended for the perusal of his followers? Very probably. And we may well believe that the famous Frenchman's inclusion of *Tom Jones* in his "Positivist Library"⁸ met with her approbation. To measure the change that was taking place in the *general* attitude toward Fielding during the new scientific era, it is illuminating to compare the attitude of George Eliot in the third quarter of the century with that of Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, and other women novelists who were writing in 1800. Not much has ever been said about her knowledge of Fielding's works; in fact, the impression seems to prevail that Richardson was a greater favorite with her than his rival. Space is lacking for a detailed treatment of the matter; but the suggestion may be made that she was better acquainted with Fielding than has generally been supposed. According to Sir A. W. Ward, "beautiful, patient" Milly Barton in George Eliot's earliest book, *Scenes from Clerical Life*, was "surely not called Amelia without intention" by "a reader of both Fielding and Thackeray."⁹ Some years later, in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), while making a Fieldingesque analysis of motive, she refers to "charming Sophia Western." Finally, in *Middlemarch* (1871), we have the following celebrated passage, which should be given entire. Looking back on the leisurely days of Fielding, she writes somewhat wistfully:

"A Great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago,

⁶ *The Atlantic Monthly*, XXXIII, 686, 687.

⁸ Comte, Auguste, *System of Positive Polity*, London, 1877, IV, 483. The preface to the French edition is dated 1854. None of Richardson's novels found a place in Comte's list.

⁹ "The Political and Social Novel," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, 1917, XIII, 430, 430 note.

and so to take his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to bring his armchair to the 'proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when the days were longer . . . when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a camp-stool in a parrot-house. I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe."¹⁰ By her recognition of Fielding as one of the "colossi" of English fiction and of the "lusty ease" of his "fine English," George Eliot, because of her great vogue and authority, did much for the appreciation of Fielding's style; James Russell Lowell remembered the passage in his Taunton speech (1883), and before the century was out her glowing tribute became one of the commonplaces of criticism.

It is a fact worth emphasizing that the popularity of George Eliot's own novels furnished a new and better standard than the prevailing one for the criticism of those of Fielding. Since the days of Scott, there had been a feeling that the absolutely realistic portrayal of common types of character was lacking in imagination. Neither Dickens, nor, indeed, Thackeray could view life entirely as it was—Dickens employing fantastic, and Thackeray, sentimental (or at least over-emotional) lenses. By the reading public, therefore, from Scott to George Eliot, one of the most common charges made against the realistic Fielding was that though his picture of life was real it was the picture of very "low life." Among the first to link George

¹⁰ *Middlemarch*, London, 1871, I, 250, 251.

Eliot's name with that of her great predecessor was the able French critic, F. Brunetière, who, in his *Roman Naturaliste*, after complaining of the "dureté" of the "*petits naturalistes*" of his own country, warmly commends the sympathetic realism of Fielding and George Eliot, which is "*si indulgent, si compatissant, si humain.*"¹¹ Taught by George Eliot to sympathize with *mixed* types drawn from ordinary life, the readers of the 'Seventies were better able to appreciate the depiction of such types in Fielding. It is true the change came slowly.

Rather with Meredith than with George Eliot, however, did the author of *Tom Jones* enjoy the greater spiritual kinship—a kinship which the writer of the essay *On the Comic Spirit* (1877) eloquently acknowledges in a well-known passage. "O for a breath of Aristophanes, Rabelais, Voltaire, Cervantes, Fielding, Molière!" he exclaims, thinking presumably of the famous invocation in the Thirteenth Book of *Tom Jones*.¹² "These are spirits that, if you know them well, will come when you do call. You will find the very invocation of them act on you like a renovating air—the South-West coming off the sea, or a cry in the Alps." Very different this, from Carlyle's talk of Fielding's "loose" morals and lack of "reality," or Ruskin's picture of him as a hungry dog, licking his chops over "ordure." Eventually—though with great difficulty—it obtained an audience; in the 'Seventies we feel, at least, that a change is in the air—a "renovating" change.

A recent writer on Meredith has said:¹³ "To the novelist Richardson, too, a careful reader will find that Meredith, both in manner and matter (notably in *The Egoist* and in *Richard Feverel*), owes a good deal"; Mrs. Grandison in *Richard Feverel* recalls Sir Charles Grandison "by name"; and "nobody can doubt that Sir Willoughby Patterne, both in idea and oftener in expression, was modelled on Richardson's

¹¹ Brunetière, F., *Le Roman Naturaliste*, Paris, 1892, p. 338.

¹² "Come, thou that hast inspired thy Aristophanes, thy Lucian, thy Cervantes, thy Rabelais, thy Molière."—*Tom Jones*, Book XIII, ch. i.

¹³ Chisholm, Hugh, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, eleventh ed., 1911, XVIII, 162 ("Meredith").

creation." To these instances we may add the praise of Sir Charles (see the final chapter of *Evan Harrington*) which is put in the mouth of the Countess de Saldar. But to speak of Meredith as a follower of Richardson is to accuse a satirist of imitating the thing he satirizes. The vacuously elegant ideal of the Countess de Saldar and the apotheosis of pride and sentimentality as represented by Sir Willoughby are the very thing the author is trying to destroy; indeed, he himself takes pains to tell us that the "look of Fielding upon Richardson is essentially comic," *i.e.*, informed by that "laughter of the mind" which Meredith strove always to attain. Making all allowances for his greater minuteness, we see that Meredith has far more (in fact a very real) kinship with the great ironist whose *Jonathan Wild* found a place in the youthful Richard Feverel's room. This kinship was so obvious that it became a stock topic of discussion. Henley, who was instrumental in exploiting Meredith, called attention¹⁴ to it more than once; one of the main characteristics of Fielding, he asserts, is "that abundant vein of pure intellectual comedy by the presence of which his work is exalted to a place not much inferior to that of such work as the 'Tartuffe' and the 'École des Femmes.'"¹⁵

For illustrations of his theory of comedy, Meredith draws freely upon Fielding. *Jonathan Wild*, he says, "presents a case" of the "peculiar distinction" between the *comic* (which gives rise to "thoughtful laughter") and the *humorous* or the *satiric*, "when that man of eminent greatness remarks upon the unfairness of a trial in which the condemnation has been brought about by twelve men of the opposite party . . . it is immensely comic to hear a guilty villain protesting that his own 'party' should have a voice in the Law."¹⁶ As a further

¹⁴ So, also, did James Thomson ("B.V."), who, though unduly impressed by the old stories, paid homage to the "swift, keen insight" of "great Fielding."—*Cope's Tobacco Plant*, II, 333-336.

¹⁵ Henley, W. E., in *The Athenaeum*, November 4, 1882, p. 593; in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 3, 1879, Henley said that Meredith had been "called 'a kind of Foppington-Fielding.'"

¹⁶ "I may have dreamed this . . .," says Meredith (though needlessly), "for on referring to 'Jonathan Wild' I do not find it."

instance of the *comic*, there is "the exclamation of Lady Booby, when Joseph defends himself: '*Your virtue!* I shall never survive it!'" also the aside of Miss Matthews in her narrative to Booth: "'But such are the friendships of women!'" We are told, furthermore, that Fielding's "method of correcting" the "sentimental" Richardson is a "mixture of the comic and the humorous"—Parson Adams being "a creation of humour."¹⁷ Presumably from the time of *Feverel* (1859), when he exhibited "Briareus reddening angrily over the sea" and "Hesper set in his rosy Garland," to the time when he brought out his *Essay on Comedy* (1877), and, indeed, as long as he lived, Meredith was not forgetful of the master of the comic-prose-epic. It must be admitted, of course, that Meredith is a poet and that Fielding is not; the passages in *Feverel* in which are mingled romantic love and poetic feeling for nature have no counterpart in *Tom Jones*. There is much more love of nature in Fielding's works than he has usually been given credit for; but he lived before the days of poetical exploitations in prose fiction of the beauties of earth, air, and water. Again, Meredith is a phrase-maker and Fielding is not; eloquent Fielding can be at times and his works are sprinkled with wise sayings, but he was averse to conceits as a staple of expression. Yet, after all allowances—romantic, naturalistic, and "metaphysical"—have been made, the similarities¹⁸ between Meredith and Fielding are clear enough. Both authors were at war against pride and sentimentalism, against vanity and hypocrisy, against undemocratic ways of thinking; both took the point of view of comedy, following Molière in regarding the comic as the spirit of intellectualized laughter and in believing that its high mission is to laugh men out of their follies; both incorporated in their books as an integral part of the structure the actual commentary on life

¹⁷ "On the Idea of Comedy," in *The New Quarterly Magazine*, VIII, 1-40 (1877). Delivered as a lecture, February 1, 1877.

¹⁸ Arthur Symonds, who dwells upon this kinship, asserts that "the modern English novel begins" with *Tom Jones*, in which "the very soil is living."—*Dramatis Personae*, Indianapolis [1923], p. 52.

of the essayist; and both intended that their novels should furnish wisdom as well as mere entertainment by illustrating a philosophy of life saner and more charitable than was to be found in the works of their immediate predecessors.

Even when realism—as exemplified, say, by *Middlemarch* (1871)—was coming into its own, a revival of romance was under way; as a matter of fact, the old heresy about the superiority of Sir Walter over Fielding had never died out, appearing from time to time in high places as well as low. R. S. Mackenzie, for instance, asserts in his book on Scott (1871) that Fielding “may rank” as one of “the inventors of the English novel, though not of its higher class,—the historical”;¹⁹ and in that once popular manual entitled *Three Centuries of English Literature* (1872), by C. D. Yonge, the statement is made that even *Vanity Fair* is “not indeed of the very highest class” of novel, “such as *Ivanhoe*,” but “rather of the school of Fielding.”²⁰ It was this inability to appreciate true realism which caused the sentimental Fitzgerald to declare, in 1871, that Fielding’s characters were “common and vulgar types; of Squires, Ostlers, Lady’s maids etc., very easily drawn”;²¹ and which inspired John Ruskin’s pronunciamiento (1873)—to which we have previously alluded—that no one who had the dunghill (“fimetic”) taint could properly create character, and that since Fielding had this taint, Squire Western could not compete with Addison’s Sir Roger, but was only “a type of the rude English squire”²²—not a character at all! Still it is apparent, in spite of this attack upon Fielding in 1873 (and that more savage youthful onslaught in 1840) that Ruskin, like many others mentioned in this history, was considerably troubled by certain excellences in a writer whom he constitutionally disliked. Protest as he

¹⁹ Mackenzie, R. S., *Sir Walter Scott*, Boston, 1871, p. 204.

²⁰ Yonge, C. D., *Three Centuries of English Literature*, 1872, p. 631.

²¹ Fitzgerald, E., *Letters*, London, 1889, I, 335.

²² Ruskin’s *Works*, edited by Cook and Wedderburn, XXVII, 631 (letter 34, October, 1873).

might against Fielding's lack of sublimity, there were times when, like Walpole and Dr. Johnson, he had a word of commendation. In 1875, while finding fault with Frith's painting of Sophia Western, he asks, after explaining his objections in detail: "But what is the use of painting from Fielding at all? Of all our classic authors, it is he who demands the reader's attention most strictly; and what modern reader attends to anything?"²³ Frith, by the way, who could not "agree with Dr. Johnson that Richardson is a greater writer than Fielding," had taken great pains with his "little picture," in which Tom shows Sophia "her own image in the glass as a pledge of his future constancy."²⁴ During the same year Ruskin, waxing enthusiastic in "Fors Clavigera" over his conception of a pattern priest, writes (March, 1875): "I do not know if, in modern schools of literature, the name of Henry Fielding is ever mentioned; but . . . I think it right . . . to refer my readers to . . . one of the most beautiful types I know [Parson Adams] of the character of English clergymen, (the 'Vicar of Wakefield' not excepted)."²⁵ And in 1877 he went so far as to speak of Fielding as a writer "whom Mr. Gale and I agree in holding to be a truly moral novelist, and worth any quantity of modern ones since Scott's death,—be they who they may."²⁶ For all that, however, Richardson, in his judgment, was not merely "the greatest of our English moral story-tellers,"²⁷ but the only one in that (to him) barren eighteenth century who—in the characters of Pamela, Clementina, and Clarissa—has given us examples of true romantic art.²⁸

Ruskin's romantic friends the Pre-Raphaelites, naturally enough, were never entirely at the point of view of Fielding;

²³ Ruskin's *Works*, edited by Cook and Wedderburn, XIV, 279.

²⁴ W. P. Frith, R.A., *My Autobiography*, New York, 1888, I, 306, 308.

²⁵ Ruskin's *Works*, edited by Cook and Wedderburn, XXVIII, 287-288.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, XXIX, 220, "Fors Clavigera," letter 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XXV, 355 ("Proserpina," Vol. I, ch. xi).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 373.

of the group which included Swinburne, Rossetti, and Morris, Swinburne alone seems to have had a very high opinion of the author of *Tom Jones*. It is true that in a letter (December 8, 1876) to Watts-Dunton, he says, "I am confident enough of your fellow-feeling with me on the scale of that great man."²⁹ Of *David Copperfield*, he wrote, "The narrative is as coherent and harmonious as that of 'Tom Jones'; and to say this is to try it by the very highest and apparently the most unattainable standard." And in his well-known tribute to Dickens himself he touches upon that writer's kinship with the older novelist most delightfully:

Love sees thy spirit laugh and speak and shine
With Shakespeare and the soft bright soul of Sterne
And Fielding's kindest might and Goldsmith's grace;
Scarce one more loved or worthier love than thine.³⁰

On the other hand, he "reaffirmed" his "conviction that even the glorious masterpiece of Fielding's radiant and beneficent genius, if in some points superior [to *David Copperfield*], is by no means superior in all. Tom is a far completer and more living type of gallant boyhood and generous young manhood than David; but even the lustre of Partridge is pallid and lunar beside the noontide glory of Micawber." Obviously Swinburne never experienced the actual love for Fielding that he expressed for certain modern novelists; "Dickens, Walter Scott, and Jane Austen," according to the editors of his *Letters*, "stood first in his estimation."³¹ In his own *Note on Charlotte Brontë* (1877), he lists the "sovereign masterpieces" as those of Fielding, Thackeray, and Scott; but the "royal and imperial master" in the realm of fiction is unquestionably Sir Walter.

Neither from Rossetti nor Morris has a phrase appreciative of Fielding yet found a place in literary history. Rossetti, we

²⁹ *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, London, 1918, p.

132.

³⁰ *The Collected Poetical Works*, London, 1917, V, 238.

³¹ *The Letters of . . . Swinburne*, p. 181.

are told,³² had never "given any thought to fiction as an art" before those memorable nights at the lonely farm-house in the Vale of St. John, a year or so before the poet's death, when Hall Caine, preparing for a course of lectures on fiction, read aloud *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa*, one or two of Smollett's novels, and some of Scott's. Rossetti's "intellect," writes Caine, "played over" the pages "like a bright light"; but what he thought of Fielding we are not told. The attitude of William Morris may be inferred from the following circumstance. In the list of books which, after Lubbock's famous lecture, Morris drew up for William Stead, Defoe, even to *Moll Flanders*, was included; but there was no Fielding (and no Richardson, Smollett, or Sterne). To quote his daughter, Morris "disliked the brilliant eighteenth century classics in the lump."³³

So much for the Pre-Raphaelites. We have now to speak of Stevenson, who, as a young enthusiast, was preparing to revolutionize English prose fiction by restoring to romance that prestige which it had enjoyed in the days of the Waverley Novels. It was in his essay on Victor Hugo in *The Cornhill Magazine* (1874) that he issued his manifesto, and explained in what respects the productions of Sir Walter were superior to those of Henry Fielding. But before taking up this matter in detail attention should be called to a document in which part of Stevenson's argument was anticipated by that veteran *littérateur* and lover of Scott, Charles Cowden Clarke. In an article "On the Comic Writers of England" (1872), Clarke spoke of the "very meagre" descriptions of "scenery particularly of rural scenery" in Fielding's novels, compared with those in the novels of Sir Walter, "whose order of mind was absolutely panoramic." Fielding, he thinks, was an able psychologist, who "busied himself solely with human nature"—its "principles, and general, intimate, and remote feelings"; and "rarely," he says, "has anyone turned his studies to more

³² By Hall Caine; see *My First Book . . . with an Introduction* by Jerome K. Jerome, London, 1897, pp. 63-66.

³³ *The Collected Works of William Morris*, London, etc., 1914, XXII, xxvi.

ample account than he." But unlike Scott, who "was a true poet, Fielding had very little *external* imagination, and even less fancy; he never went out of the scenes in which he had been accustomed to move."³⁴

Stevenson, advancing the banner of romance, goes farther than Clarke. What he really tries to do in his essay on *Victor Hugo* (1874) is to put new life into the old tradition that the romantic novels of Hugo and Scott belong to a higher order than *Tom Jones*; by supplying a background of manners and customs as well as of landscape, these masters of fiction, he declares, have realized "for men a larger portion of life." Though this statement is undoubtedly true, it does not necessarily follow, as he implies, that Scott's novels are superior to Fielding's; but having started out boldly on his career as a propagandist young Stevenson was unhampered. In his student days (1871-1872) according to Graham Balfour, he had admitted the works of Fielding to his "*Catalogus Librorum Carissimorum*";³⁵ but there came a time when he found no place for them in his books for a chimney corner, when he declared that the author of *Tom Jones* could never have been in love,³⁶ and when he fell foul of that *chef d'œuvre* itself. In the essay on *Victor Hugo*, he had not yet arrived at such extremes. "When we compare the novels of Walter Scott," he writes, "with those of the man of genius who preceded him and whom he delighted to honour as a master in the art—I mean Henry Fielding—we shall be somewhat puzzled, at the first moment, to explain the difference that there is between these two. Fielding has as much human science; has a far firmer hold upon the tiller of his story; has a keen sense of character; which he draws (and Scott often does so too) in a rather abstract and academical manner; and finally, is quite as humorous and quite as good-humoured as the great Scotchman. With all these points of resemblance between the men,

³⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, N. S., VIII, 558.

³⁵ Balfour, Graham, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, New York, 1901, I, 117 note.

³⁶ *The Cornhill Magazine*, XXXV, 215 (February, 1877).

it is astonishing that their work should be so different"; and this difference "marks a great enfranchisement. With Scott the Romantic movement, the movement of an extended curiosity and an enfranchised imagination has begun." Briefly, what Sir Walter did—in order to liberate the minds of men—was to supply background or setting. Fielding, "although he had recognised that the novel was nothing else than an epic in prose, wrote in the spirit not of the epic, but of the drama": he "remained ignorant of certain capabilities which the novel possesses over the drama"; his world was "a world of exclusively human interest. As for landscape he was content to underline stage directions, as it might be done in a play-book: Tom and Molly retire into a practicable wood. As for nationality and public sentiment it is curious enough to think that Tom Jones is laid in the year forty-five, and that the only use he makes of the rebellion is to throw a troop of soldiers into his hero's way." Between the works of Hugo and those of Fielding there is indeed an even greater "gulph in thought and sentiment."⁸⁷

Deferring for the moment further discussion of this matter, we may note that Stevenson, like many other romancers (though it seems strange in this instance) greatly preferred Richardson to Fielding. In a letter of December, 1877, he asked a friend to "institute a search in all Melbourne for one of the rarest and certainly one of the best books—*Clarissa Harlowe*." "For any man who takes an interest in the problem of the two sexes," the letter goes on, "that book is a perfect mine of documents. And it is written, sir, with the pen of an angel."⁸⁸ He was not blind, however, to the unpopularity of Richardson in the 'Eighties, the reason for which he discourses upon in "A Gossip on Romance" (November, 1882). Nothing, he writes, "can more strongly illustrate the necessity for marking incident than to compare the living fame of 'Robinson Crusoe' with the discredit of 'Clarissa Harlowe.' 'Clarissa'

⁸⁷ *The Cornhill Magazine*, XXX, 179-184 (August, 1874).

⁸⁸ Stevenson, R. L., *Letters*, edited by S. Colvin, New York, 1900, I, 141.

is a book of a far more startling import, worked out, on a great canvas, with inimitable courage and unflagging art; it contains wit, character, passion, plot, conversations full of spirit and insight, letters sparkling with unstrained humanity; and . . . yet a little story of a shipwrecked sailor, with not a tenth part of the style nor a thousandth part of the wisdom, exploring none of the arcana of humanity . . . goes on from edition to edition . . . while 'Clarissa' lies upon the shelves unread."³⁹ Sir Walter Scott, unlike his distinguished young follower, greatly preferred Fielding; and he made an acute observation when he said that the works of Richardson were but a step from the old romance.

Despite the truth in Stevenson's criticism of Fielding as lacking in background, he no doubt overstates his case. So thought the editor of *The Cornhill Magazine*, Leslie Stephen, who wrote, in a letter dated May 15, 1874, "In my opinion, you are scarcely just to Scott or Fielding as compared with Hugo."⁴⁰ Moreover, as his friendly editor pointed out, Stevenson had blundered in his use of terms. "To my mind," said Stephen, "Hugo is far more dramatic in spirit than Fielding, though his method involves . . . a use of scenery and background which would hardly be admissible in drama," and "surely Hugo's dramas are a sufficient proof that a drama may be romantic as well as a novel." Yet the author of these strictures, who, like his contributor, delighted in the romances of Scott, was never quite comfortable with the author of *Tom Jones*, though he wrote more about him than anyone else in this decade and was soon to become his editor.

While he had for several years spoken casually of Fielding in magazine articles, it was in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) that Stephen first sketched in firm outline his portrait of the novelist as the writer of all writers who gives us the very "form and pressure" of a cen-

³⁹ Stevenson's "A Gossip on Romance," *Longman's Magazine*, I, 73, 74.

⁴⁰ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Biographical edition, edited by S. Colvin, New York, 1911, I, 155-156 note.

tury distinguished for its sturdy common sense and for its suspicion of all forms of spiritual or romantic exaltation. The following passage will serve as an illustration, not only of his attitude toward Fielding in this work but also in his *Hours in a Library* (1879) and in his "Memoir" of Fielding (1882):

"No enchanted light of old romance colours or distorts his fictions; we do not feel that his characters are puppets in the hands of an irresistible destiny, or constituent atoms of a vast organism slowly developing under the action of gigantic forces; there is no tender regret for past forms of society or passionate aspirations for the future. But for insight into the motives of his contemporaries; for a power of seeing things as they are; for sympathy with homely virtues; and contempt for shams and hypocrites, Fielding is as superior to some later writers of equal imaginative force as they are superior to him in width of sympathy and delicacy of perception. His art is thus the most faithful representative of his age; he gives its coarseness and its brutalities, and sometimes with too little consciousness of their evils, though no one ever satirised more powerfully the worst abuses of the time. But he also represents the strong healthy common sense and stubborn honesty of the sound English nature, with a certain massive power of grouping and colouring which is peculiar to himself.

"In Fielding and his beloved Hogarth we have the 'prosai-comi-epos'—I use Fielding's phrase—of the middle class of the time. Richardson, though a greater artist, is far inferior in sheer intellectual vigour; and Smollett is comparatively but a caricaturist. Fielding announced that his object is to give a faithful picture of human nature. Human nature includes many faculties which had an imperfect play under the conditions of the time; there were dark sides to it, of which, with all his insight, he had but little experience; and heroic impulses, which he was too much inclined to treat as follies. But the more solid constituents of that queer compound, as they presented themselves under the conditions of the time, were never more clearly revealed to any observer. A complete criticism of the English artistic literature of the eighteenth century

would place Fielding at the centre, and measure the completeness of other representatives pretty much as they recede from an approach to his work. Others, as Addison and Goldsmith, may show finer qualities of workmanship and more delicate sentiment; but Fielding, more than any one, gives the essential—the very form and pressure of the time.”⁴¹

Not long after the appearance of his *History of English Thought*, Stephen devoted an entire essay to “Fielding’s Novels,” which, originally published in *The Cornhill Magazine* (1877), came out in book form in the Third Series of *Hours in a Library* (1879). In this article we find the same order of ideas as before—Fielding’s love for the homely virtues, his “common sense” and “intellectual vigour,” his lack of heroic impulses; but the tone has changed to a kind of enforced chumminess—obviously an aping of his father-in-law, Thackeray, whose manner does not sit quite easily upon the fundamentally ascetic Stephen. There are admirable things in the essay; and none deserves higher praise than his portrait of Fielding as a great and serious artist. To begin with, Stephen reacted, as far as his devotion to Thackeray would allow him, against the popular idea of a mere careless and dissolute humorist: Fielding’s biographers have dwelt, he says, “far too exclusively upon the uglier side of his Bohemian life.” Nor could anyone be “more heartily convinced” than Fielding “of the beauty and value of those solid domestic instincts on which human happiness must chiefly depend.” Again, Stephen was sure not only of Fielding’s seriousness of purpose but—despite his previous statement that Richardson was the “greater artist”—of his artistic superiority; to his mind, he was unquestionably the greatest novelist of the eighteenth century. Several years before, in his First Series of *Hours in a Library*, Stephen had endeavored to explode Richardson’s claim as a great moralist. Now, in this essay, he drew the line even more firmly and distinctly between Fielding and Smollett. Fielding’s “seriousness of purpose,” he insists, should not be confused for a

⁴¹ *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1876, II, 380.

moment with Smollett's mere desire to amuse. This seriousness of purpose brings about "unity" as opposed to "looseness of construction"—not mere *unity of plot*, but "organic unity." In other words, the excellence of plot in Fielding "depends upon the skill with which it is made subservient to the development of character and the thoroughness with which the working motives of the persons involved have been thought out." It had been obvious to many critics that Fielding was a greater plot-builder than Smollett; but Stephen called attention to the fact that between Fielding and Smollett there was a complete difference in aim and method. Fielding's novels, he declared, were "intended in our modern jargon as genuine studies in psychological analysis"; and the author himself, in his opinion, has the best claim to be considered the founder of the modern novel.

Still, in presenting a worldly-minded Fielding whose most essential qualities are shrewd common sense, and an ethical system for the average man of the world, Stephen assuredly mistakes his author. The most essential teaching of *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* is not the merely prudential advice to avoid serious inconveniences by shunning intemperance.⁴² Fielding does, indeed, show the results of folly and villainy; but his main purpose is the inculcation of good-heartedness and human brotherhood. No writer of his day was more impressed by the fact that society is quite generally deceived as to what constitutes true greatness and true Christianity. According to Stephen, Fielding's vision included merely the "domestic" virtues; he had little conception of any more "lofty" motive. As a matter of fact, Fielding drew attention constantly (as Lytton pointed out in 1832) to what we call to-day the standards of "public morality"; and if the ideals of true-heartedness and generosity, of brotherly love, self-sacrifice, and forgiveness be not

⁴² As early as 1862, T. H. Green, the philosopher, denying to Fielding (in a youthful prize essay) "all romantic virtue," declared that the "moral" of his novels, "if moral it can be called, is simply the importance of . . . prudence."—*An Estimate of the Value . . . of . . . Fiction*, edited by F. N. Scott, Ann Arbor, 1911, pp. 39, 66.

"lofty," one wonders how Stephen would classify the teachings of the Master himself. Talk as we may, position, wealth, and capability of mere nervous exaltation are more sought after even at the present day than a pure and generous heart, which, in Fielding's opinion, is of more value than a coronet.

Not only did Stephen discover no "philosophy" in the great novels, but he insisted that Fielding turned up his nose at philosophers in general and that he regarded "philosophy" as a fine name for "humbug." Nothing could be farther from the truth than either of these assumptions. Anyone who is inclined to believe with Stephen that Fielding despised the ancient philosophers should turn to the following passage about them in *Tom Jones*: "These authors, though they instructed me in no science by which men may promise to themselves to acquire the least riches or worldly power, taught me, however, the art of despising the highest acquisitions of both. They elevate the mind, and steel and harden it against the capricious invasions of fortune. They not only instruct in the knowledge of Wisdom, but confirm men in her habits, and demonstrate plainly, that this must be our guide, if we propose ever to arrive at the greatest worldly happiness, or to defend ourselves, with any tolerable security, against the misery which everywhere surrounds and invests us."⁴³ It was no mere "homespun moralist" or low-thoughted materialist or "amiable buffalo" or "reckless enjoyer" who wrote: "True it is that philosophy makes us wiser, but Christianity makes us better men. Philosophy elevates and steels the mind but Christianity softens and sweetens it." And here is the root of the matter—Fielding's works are unphilosophical, declares Stephen, because in them "we scarcely come into contact with man as he appears in presence of the infinite, and therefore with the deepest thoughts and loftiest imaginings of the great poets and philosophers." Fielding, like Parson Adams, he says, "has no eye for the romantic side of his creed"; in short, his "dislike to the romantic makes him rather blind to the elevated." This is the old heresy which had been

⁴³ *Tom Jones*, Book VIII, ch. xiii.

prevalent ever since the days of Walter Scott. Stephen missed in Fielding the sense of the mystical, the feeling of "Oh! Altitudo!"⁴⁴ the emotions of romantic wonder and religious awe. But Fielding's belief in the beneficence of Providence, in the essential goodness of man's nature, in the possibility of human regeneration, in the immortality of the soul—all these are philosophic ideas which deserve neither neglect nor contempt. Fielding is not, indeed, a mystic—his mood is not often the mood of wonder; but though few writers have enjoyed life more, still fewer have set a higher value upon the spiritual nature of man as opposed to the extrinsic trappings of riches and position. To him a romantic over-emotionalism which does not express itself in generous deeds was pernicious rather than "lofty."

As a devoted son-in-law of Thackeray, Leslie Stephen found it difficult to eradicate from his mind the notion that Tom Jones was "Fielding in his youth," and that Captain Booth was "Fielding of later years"; that the "worldly wisdom for which Fielding is so conspicuous" had been "gathered in doubtful places"; that since his tastes had been perverted by his life, he "condemned purity as puritanical"; that this lamentable "confusion" "shows itself in one shape or other throughout his work"; and, finally, that Colonel Newcome, rather than Coleridge, has given the true criticism of the Lady Bellaston incident—the "great and obvious blot upon the story" of *Tom Jones*.⁴⁵ And so it happened that in 1882, when Stephen had to prepare (for his *édition de luxe*) an account not merely of Fielding the Novelist but of Fielding the Man, he apparently forgot his excellent observations in the *Hours in a Library* to the effect that previous biographers had dealt too exclusively with the Bohemian side of the author of *Tom Jones*, and accepted in many particulars the roysterer which his father-in-law Thackeray delighted to portray. Though Stephen distrusted the story that the "liveries" at East

⁴⁴ *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, II, 370.

⁴⁵ For "Fielding's Novels," see *The Cornhill Magazine*, XXXV, pp. 154-171 (February, 1877).

Stour were "yellow," he had no thought of relinquishing the idea of Fielding's wanton extravagance; though he could not avoid realizing Fielding's great accomplishment as a magistrate, yet, chary of praise, he would have it that the justice employed in his work "very dirty tools," and that one of these "tools" was to be found among his second "wife's poor relations"⁴⁶—a wild conjecture, as has been proved, albeit Stephen clung to it tenaciously. And again, following the lead of Lawrence and others (who took their cue from Thackeray), Stephen hears in *Amelia* Fielding's "penitential regrets for the neglect with which he had sometimes treated the woman of whom he was not worthy" on account of "his occasional backslidings." We need not go on with the biographical part of the "Memoir," which, to quote Professor Cross, is an "outrageous" performance on the part of the "last" of Fielding's "brilliant defamers."⁴⁶ Suffice it to say that Stephen was never quite comfortable with Fielding, nor, in spite of his many excellent observations, was he ever quite at that novelist's point of view; always in the background was the apparition conjured up by Thackeray.

For the critical portion of his "Memoir" Stephen contented himself, for the most part, with a reiteration of his previous *dicta*. Some new findings there are, of course, and among these several very admirable ones. He was, for example, perhaps the first influential English critic to draw the line firmly between the realism of Fielding and the "naturalism" of the French novelists, which was then so popular in England. Critically, as well as biographically, however, the "Memoir,"⁴⁷ in spite of much that is good, is disappointing—often actually misleading. Stephen starts out again and again in some excellently reasoned passage and then, catching sight as it were of the bogies constructed by Thackeray and Taine, hastens to remind us that Fielding and his works are indelibly stained,

⁴⁶ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 242-247.

⁴⁷ Fielding's *Works*, edited by Leslie Stephen, London, 1882, I, iii-civ.

and that instead of being an imaginative artist of the highest rank he is only a wonderfully "shrewd observer" whose prime virtue is "homespun morality" and "massive common-sense." There is "no English novelist," runs a characteristic passage, "who within the prescribed limits of his work gives us the same impression of thorough sincerity and complete mastery of his materials"; but he is "wanting in refinement, and his sensibility to the higher moral impulses is limited." What he *does* give us (according to Stephen he leaves out "much"), is "the first-hand observation of a thoroughly shrewd, reflective, generous mind." For portraying a very intellectual and substantial Fielding in a time when the popular presentment was that of a reckless and wastrel enjoyer Stephen undoubtedly deserves credit; but we really get little notion in his essay of the supreme ironist of the *comédie humaine*. A more unlucky epithet than "homespun" for the radiant follower of Molière could hardly be discovered; Fielding was neither a Polonius (as Stephen suggests in the *Hours*) nor a Benjamin Franklin.

The "Memoir" was well received; for there was in it enough adverse criticism of Fielding to satisfy the ordinary paragrapher. A writer in *The Saturday Review*,⁴⁸ characterizing the essay as an "admirable" piece of work, proceeds to find most of its admirableness in Stephen's derogatory concessions rather than in his direct praise of Fielding's intellectual quality. He commends the editor for wasting no time in the vain attempt to remove the "stains" from the novels, and quotes with approbation the statement that "Fielding did not always know when he was becoming disgusting." And then, as is the way with reviewers, he ends inconsistently by saying that "we regard [Fielding] almost with a feeling of personal affection"; and that, reprehensible as his works are, they are preferable to those of "more than one" of the popular novelists of 1882.

• According to *The Spectator*, Scott's "range is immeasurably wider" than that of Fielding; his novels are "glorified throughout by a poetical imagination"; and, being "always

⁴⁸ *The Saturday Review*, LIII, 114, 115 (January 28, 1882).

the gentleman," he avoids by instinct "the coarse animalism" of his predecessor. Dickens, too, "never panders" to a "prurient" mind. To sum up, Fielding "was not a serious thinker"; for had not Mr. Stephen himself admitted that "the kind of reflections by which the highest minds are preoccupied are entirely alien to such a writer!"⁴⁹

The influence of Stephen's characterization of Fielding as a "common-sense" and "homespun" moralist upon subsequent accounts of him has been very different at different times. Because of the author's position as a critic, it gave Fielding in some quarters and on certain occasions a higher rating as a thinker and reformer than he had ever before enjoyed. A notable review of Stephen was one by Paul Stapfer (in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for September 15, 1890) which begins, "Fielding est, comme Molière, un de ces auteurs excellens dont le solide génie est fait surtout de bon sens." The French critic pictures for his readers "ce débauché de Fielding" squandering his money heedlessly; yet he finds *Tom Jones* more radiant than Stephen did with "la gaîté" and "la joie," and—taking the hint from Brunetière—asserts that the great novels were read with profit by George Eliot, whose "grand roman de sympathie et d'amour" was certainly not "d'origine russe."⁵⁰ But Stapfer was greatly in the minority. In too many instances the logical outcome of Stephen's essay was such a criticism as the following in the *Quarterly* for July, 1886: "Fielding's genius is limited to the commonplace, and restrained by the common-sense of the day. His mind is prosaic. He is not sympathetic enough to attempt pathos; he is dull to the more enthusiastic side of human nature; scenery exercised no spell over his feelings."⁵¹ Such an unspiritualized Fielding is also elaborated in *Morality in English Fiction* by J. A. Noble, who, repeating Stephen's catchword "common sense," asserts that Fielding's weakness is "a certain want of elevation, which expressed itself in an implied denial of any

⁴⁹ *The Spectator*, LV, 533 (April 22, 1882).

⁵⁰ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, CI, 412-454.

⁵¹ *The Quarterly Review*, CLXIII, 48.

ideal whatsoever"; or, that if he had an ideal, Tom Jones was "clearly an embodiment" of it. Obviously with Stephen in mind, Noble says Fielding's creed is "that of the average man of the world," a prudential morality which declares: "Take care of yourself by all means; be as respectable as you can if your taste leads you" that way.⁵² One can imagine the ironic smile with which Fielding would have perused such an interpretation as this of his philosophy of life!

Leslie Stephen, who carried on the work that Thackeray started, was one of the most influential pioneers in that renaissance of interest in the age of Pope and Johnson which became perceptible by the 'Seventies. "Till recent years the eighteenth century had a bad name among us . . .," runs an article in *The Cornhill Magazine* for November, 1878, "Moralists condemned its vices. The High Churchman of 1833 blotted it from his calendar. It was generally voted an unspiritual, 'unideal,' and materialistic age."⁵³ But the revival was now actually under way, as a glance at the publications of this period will show; and in consequence of the new awakening, Fielding became a figure of increasing importance. Mark Pattison, in a review (1872) of Elwin's *Pope*, speaks admiringly of those "imperceptible suggestions" which characterize "the refined humour of Fielding";⁵⁴ and during the same year, William Allingham records in his diary this bit of conversation with Carlyle:

ALLINGHAM. Voltaire is always crapulous, often nasty, when speaking of the relation of the sexes. Very different from Fielding who, though he takes liberties, warmly recognizes true love.

CARLYLE. And I believe Fielding was very much attached to his own wife.⁵⁵

⁵² J. A. Noble's *Morality in English Fiction*, Liverpool, 1886, 19, 15, 20.

⁵³ Kebbel, T. E., "The Eighteenth Century," in *The Cornhill Magazine*, XXXVIII, 541.

⁵⁴ *Essays by . . . Mark Pattison*, Oxford, 1889, II, 393; see *The British Quarterly Review*, LV, 444.

⁵⁵ William Allingham's *Diary*, 1907, p. 213.

Was Carlyle at last relenting, as so many others had done? Certainly this was the case with Anthony Trollope, who, scorning Fielding in his earlier days, had lived to see his own productions weighed in the balance with *Tom Jones*.⁵⁶ Scott, he declared, "still [1879] towers among us as the first of 'novelists'; but Fielding is "supreme" in "the construction of a story and the development of a character." It is "unfair," he thinks, "to bracket"⁵⁷ Fielding with Smollett; and, though he is not quite sure about the morality of *Tom Jones*, he now regards that novel—wherein the author has "shown how a noble and sanguine nature may fall away under temptation and be again strengthened and made to stand upright"—as "one of the greatest" in "the English language."⁵⁸ Lecky's *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Vols. I and II, 1878), in which the novels of Fielding were used as historical documents, furnished the theme for many a paragraph in subsequent books and periodicals on the author of *Tom Jones* as the photographer⁵⁹ of the life of his day—an innocent idea which eventually caused considerable mischief. But the general discussion of Fielding in relation to his age brought about in at least one instance a saner account of his genius than had ever before been popular in standard books of reference. "There was no moralist of the time," declared William Minto in the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1879), "whose scorn was so heartily and steadily directed against vice, against profligacy, avarice, hypocrisy, meanness in every shape and size. . . . In breaking with conventions he remained true to society."⁶⁰ More joyous than Minto was Frederic Harrison, who in that counterblast against popular prejudice entitled "A Few Words about the Eighteenth Century" exclaims, "For

⁵⁶ See, for instance, *The Quarterly Review*, CXLV, 27 (1878).

⁵⁷ *The Nineteenth Century*, V, 31, 30.

⁵⁸ A. Trollope's *Autobiography*, Edinburgh and London, 1883, II, 162.

⁵⁹ See *The Quarterly Review*, CXLV, 514.

⁶⁰ In his popular lectures, however, Minto seems to have been a backslider.

my part I find 'the vision and the faculty divine' in the inexhaustible vivacity of *Tom Jones*'—an "imaginative force" which "has never since been reached in prose save by Walter Scott himself, and not even by him in such inimitable wickery of words."⁶¹

But in the light of subsequent events the most interesting article which appeared at this time was an anonymous notice of Stephen's edition in *The Athenæum*, November 4, 1882; for the reviewer was no less a personage than W. E. Henley. Even in the early 'Eighties, Henley had made up his mind about Fielding's greatness and essential qualities, though he dealt very gently with the shortcomings of Stephen's "Memoir." "Like Scott, like Cervantes, like Shakspeare," Fielding, writes Henley, is "a writer to be studied," and "claims not merely our acquaintance, but an intimate and abiding familiarity." Of the "essential elements of Fielding's art and mind," the "most vigorous and the most individual" is "perhaps, his irony; the next is that abundant vein of pure intellectual comedy" which exalts him "to a place not much inferior" to that of Molière. With both these qualities the "sympathy" of the reading world of 1882 was, Henley asserted, "imperfect in no small degree." "The present is an epoch of sentiment"; he continues, "its ideals and ambitions are mainly emotional; what it chiefly loves is . . . the affectation of romance, passion, self-conscious solemnity, and a certain striving after the picturesque." As evidence in point Henley calls attention to the merely "picturesque and romantic" illustrations (by Small) in Stephen's edition; these, he says, and justly, are "altogether foreign" to Fielding's art and "to the epoch in which it was produced." Stephen, he thinks, is not "so hearty and cheerful" as he was in the *Hours*: he is too much influenced by Walpole and Lady Mary, and he judges Fielding "a little" too much "according to the canons of modern morality"; but for all that the "Memoir," in his opinion, is the "best and soundest

⁶¹ *The Nineteenth Century*, XIII, 399 (March, 1883). See other articles by Harrison in *The Fortnightly Review* for April, 1879; April, 1882; March, 1885.

estimate" that "has yet appeared."⁶² Twenty years later, while writing his own celebrated essay for the 1903 edition, Henley looked back with wonder upon the homespun moralist into which Stephen had transformed Fielding, the "immitigable Ironist."

For some time before Stephen's edition appeared, Austin Dobson had been engaged upon a new biography of Fielding—carefully collecting materials, inspecting documents, and weighing evidence. Such a work was greatly needed; despite the growing interest in the novelist the old Thackeray-Taine caricature was still the dominant force in accounts of his life and genius. As a sample of the numerous *anonymia* we may quote the following passage from *Episodes of Fiction*, in which Fielding is represented as an "erring" and "reckless" man, "always dunning" his friends "for a dinner or a guinea" and diversifying "late hours and heavy drinking" by "occasional intervals of hard drinking." To such an inebriate as this, imagination and concentration were alike impossible; therefore he could describe "*only* what he saw," and the inference was that "he did not see very deeply." In conclusion, the author "would say with Thackeray, that to make a hero" of Henry Fielding "would be hopeless."⁶³ Such characterizations as these were by no means confined to unknown compilers. Here is a sentence from John Heneage Jesse's *Memoirs of Celebrated Etonians*: "Never, perhaps, has there existed a sadder example of a man of illustrious talents, and at the same time of illustrious descent, being reduced by his own indiscretions to so grievous a condition of indigence and privation as fell to the lot of the once gay and gallant Henry Fielding."⁶⁴ To this passage should be added the view of Fielding which T. S. Perry, a professed investigator of the eighteenth century, gave to his genteel Boston audience in the winter of 1881-1882. How strong the pressure of the age was upon him is

⁶² *The Athenaeum*, No. 2871, pp. 592-594; used in part for *Views and Reviews: Literature*, New York, 1890, pp. 229-235.

⁶³ *Episodes of Fiction*, Edinburgh, 1870, pp. 53-58.

⁶⁴ Jesse's *Memoirs of Celebrated Etonians*, London, 1875, I, 62.

shown by his statement (in the preface to the published volume) that he dares not use the word "evolution," and employs the term "growth" instead! Fielding, according to this Tainesque authority, is a rough and brutal picaresquer, whose characters are "forever laughing through the world, beginning, enjoying, or getting over a carouse." No one, he thinks, who has passed the age of fourteen "can get any amusement" from the scene at Parson Trulliber's; for the author has treated Adams as "a jocose savage would treat a captive," and had no motive beyond giving us "a precise copy of the rough life he had himself seen."⁶⁵ What a simple-minded yokel that spiritual kinsman of Swift's must have been! More rabid than Perry was Sidney Lanier, who, in his lectures on the English novel at Johns Hopkins University in the winter and spring of 1881, dealt with Fielding's productions swiftly and bitterly. Like Perry he, too, referred derisively to Parson Adams in the pig-stye, and protested that he could "read none of these books"—which he would "blot" from "the face of the earth"—without "feeling as if my soul had been in the rain, dragged, muddy, miserable."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ T. S. Perry's *English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1883, p. 346.

⁶⁶ Sidney Lanier's *English Novel*, New York, 1883, pp. 177, 180.

CHAPTER XVI

The New Era

PART I

From Dobson to Henley

1883-1903

WHAT Fielding stood in need of in the early 'Eighties was an estimate of his genius which should not be colored by the stories told of him as a man, by the unworshipfulness of some of his characters, by the disparagement of the times in which he lived, or by the misinterpretation of the *genre* in which he worked. In other words, what he needed was criticism of a painstaking, disinterested, scientific sort. The caricature of Fielding the Man, made popular by Thackeray, had resulted in a caricature of Fielding the Writer as a reckless and erring genius—either a mere picaresquer or a Zolaesque naturalist; a despiser of purity who sheltered the dissolute; a pedant who paraded his two-penny learning; a mere photographer of a depraved age; a writer lacking in poetic feeling, religious ecstasy, and the higher forms of the imagination; a novelist so tainted by his own vicious life that he could not depict an ideal character. Thackeray had hardly ceased—in the “Roundabout Papers”—to exploit his paradoxically bright-eyed and wonderfully gifted, but claret-stained, repentant, sponging, and morally “blunted” genius, before Taine, as we have seen, caught up the picture and, with his usual brilliant touches, produced a thick-skinned brawler, who was not a genius at all, roaring through his books with “a broken head and a bellyful.” How difficult it is to eradicate *any* caricature from minds predisposed to receive it is a proposition that needs no demonstration. And so long as such wholesale denunciations of the eighteenth century as those of Carlyle and Ruskin continued to find listeners, it was not to be hoped that a saner view of Fielding—

man or writer—could generally obtain. In the 'Eighties, however, and especially in the 'Nineties, a group of critics touched by the scientific spirit and accustomed to a new point of view had come to the fore. Dobson, Saintsbury, Gosse, and Henley were already at work, and all these writers, soon to be in the vanguard of criticism, were desirous of getting at a just assessment of Fielding's genius. It is surely an indicative fact that during the next two decades there appeared not only Dobson's life of Fielding but also—exclusive of the issues of separate novels—no less than five more or less complete editions of his works: those of Stephen (1882), Saintsbury (1893), Gosse (1898-1899), Henley (1903), and Maynardier (1903). At last the great novelist was coming into his own.

It was Austin Dobson, declared James Russell Lowell in his address at Taunton, who rescued the body of Fielding from the "swinish hoofs" that had for so long been "trampling" upon it—a figure as true as it is striking. It is only fair to say, of course, that the conditions necessary for such a deliverance were then becoming better with every year that passed; and it must be noted also that the complete recovery of Fielding was still far from being achieved. But to Dobson rightfully belongs the credit that Lowell gave him; from 1883, when his unpretentious biography¹ gained at a bound the credit for having performed a miracle, until the very end of his life Dobson was an indefatigable worker in the Fielding cause. And in the year 1883,—that *annus mirabilis* for the author of *Tom Jones*,—at the first public celebration ever held in England in Fielding's honor (a celebration at which Lowell was the orator), Austin Dobson was, very properly, *poeta qui laudat*. As we turn its pages to-day Dobson's small volume seems so restrained and circumspect that we have difficulty in picturing it as the revolutionary document which it undoubtedly was—particularly inasmuch as he referred his readers for the criticism of the novels to the "brilliant" memoir of his predecessor, Leslie Stephen. *His* interest was purely

¹ *Fielding*, London, 1883.

biographical; and his remarks about the books were brief and casual. In *Joseph Andrews*, "we have," he says, "the first sprightly runnings of a genius that, after much uncertainty, had at last found its fitting vein," but was yet, in spite of Parson Adams, "doubtful and undisciplined." *Tom Jones*, in Dobson's phrase, is "the earliest definite and authoritative manifestation of the modern novel. Its relation to De Foe is that of the vertebrate to the invertebrate; to Richardson, that of the real to the ideal—one might almost add, the impossible." On the subject of Fielding's greatest fiction, Dobson permits himself to become more enthusiastic. "What a brave wit it is," he exclaims, "what a wisdom after all, that is contained in this wonderful novel! Where shall we find its like for richness of reflection—for inexhaustible good-humour—for large and liberal humanity? . . . And what a keen and searching observation,—what a perpetual faculty of surprise,—what an endless variety of method!" In the "gentler and more subdued *Amelia*, with its tender and womanly central-figure, there is a certain change of plan, due to altered conditions—it may be, to an altered philosophy of art. The narrative is less brisk and animated; the character-painting less broadly humorous; the philanthropic element more strongly developed." Scattered through the story of Fielding's life are other *dicta*, not always commendatory, such as the one in which Dobson speaks of Coleridge's praise of the plot of *Tom Jones* as "somewhat antiquated," and needing "revision"; and, on the whole, the criticism of Fielding's books, though appreciative, is not—and does not pretend to be—elaborate. But the portrait of Fielding the Man which is here presented is in effect—though he does not emphasize the fact—a repudiation of that of Thackeray. Dobson insists that it is not fair to Fielding to speak of him as if his youth lasted forever, and asserts that "there is absolutely no good evidence that Fielding's career after his marriage materially differed from that of other men struggling for a livelihood, hampered with ill-health, and exposed to all the shifts and humiliations of neces-

sity." Availing himself of the researches of Lawrence and particularly those of Keightley, and subjecting Murphy's ramshackle "Essay" to a close scrutiny of his own, Dobson presents a Fielding relieved of considerable picturesque accretion. It is not our business here to set down the many new details which were incorporated in this biography; all that is necessary is to quote the author's own conclusion. If "any portrait of him," says Dobson, "is to be handed down to posterity, let it be the last rather than the first—not the Fielding of the green-room and the tavern . . . but the energetic magistrate, the tender husband and father, the kindly host of his poorer friends, the practical philanthropist, the patient and magnanimous hero of the *Voyage to Lisbon*."

In the world of book-reviewers, Dobson's biography was considered a success from the beginning. *The London Quarterly Review* (July, 1883), it is true, doubts "whether it is wise to add lives like Fielding's to the [E. M. L.] series"—inasmuch as his career was so "barren of interest or moral" that it is not worth telling at length. "Morality," exclaims the writer—after complaining of Dobson's leniency toward the author and his works—"morality, we are thankful to say, still counts for something in the world."² On the other hand, *The Atlantic Monthly* (July, 1883), though objecting to the "easy justification" which the biographer discovers "for Fielding's excesses," admits that he is "right in requiring a judgment" of the novels "to be based upon" the books themselves, "and not upon the tales that are told of the author's youth"; furthermore, it commends Dobson as a representative both of the new interest in the eighteenth century and of the new scientific spirit of exactness.³ *The Literary World* asserts that by confining his memoir to the biographical side Dobson has missed an "opportunity for a useful and creditable piece of work" dealing with the substance of the "great human comedy," inasmuch as Fielding, "of all the line of great Eng-

² *The London Quarterly Review*, LX, 556, 557.

³ *The Atlantic Monthly*, LII, 136.

lish novelists" was "the one who expressed his own personality most fully in his writings";⁴ *The British Quarterly*⁵ (October, 1883), after assuming Fielding's excesses as a fact, praises Dobson's book as "delicious reading," and commends his "careful research" as furnishing "a more reliable record than we have had hitherto." According to *The Saturday Review*, the biographer has been at unnecessary pains to correct exaggerations of previous writers (though it commends his *éclaircissement* of the Walpole anecdote); yet his "admiration" for Fielding, "high" as it is, must be regarded as "a thoroughly sound and reasonable one."⁶ *The Annual Register*, remarking upon the breaking up of the Scott-Thackeray myth, declares that Dobson has "written admirably of Fielding," and has endeavored with "great research" to "untangle the misleading traditions based on Murphy's 'Essay' and the unauthenticated productions of both Thackeray and Sir W. Scott." Thanks to him, "Fielding's individuality now stands out clear-revealed as it is to a great extent in his work when not dulled by the imaginings of two clever critics who have invented a portraiture for which there is no authority."⁷ *The Westminster Review*⁸ professes to find little in the Dobson "Life" that was not in Murphy, Lawrence, and Keightley; and *The Academy* even quarrels with the author for not going far enough, projecting the theory (since repeated) that "It was not debauchery that lay so heavy" upon Fielding, but "sordid domesticity." The writer rejects Fielding's "mock-epic" theory, and insists that the *History of a Foundling*—which has no kinship with the "dull, restless, heartless *roman comique*" of Scarron—is nothing more nor less than "a novel"—the "first and the best."⁹

Far and away the most able of the reviews was the one

⁴ *The Literary World* (Boston), XIV, 156-157 (May 19, 1883).

⁵ *The British Quarterly*, LXXVIII, 472.

⁶ *The Saturday Review*, LV, 573 (May 5, 1883).

⁷ *The Annual Register*, 1883, Part II, p. 74.

⁸ *The Westminster Review*, LXIV (N.S.), 267 (July, 1883).

⁹ *The Academy*, XXIII, 304 (May 5, 1883). By E. Purcell.

which appeared in *The Athenaeum*.¹⁰ This excellent article, like the previous review of Stephen, was written by W. E. Henley. "Thanks to" Dobson, he wrote, "the Fielding myth is in a fair way of dissolution. He has cleared our minds of cant; and with greater leisure for research . . . the true Fielding—in him discernible in outline—may yet be wholly recovered, and presented in all the hues of life, and all the glory of completeness." As for the Thackeray caricature, Henley continues: "With Thackeray he deals as roundly as his evident respect and admiration" will "permit," regarding, as he does, the inked ruffles and the wet towel not as "characteristics, but accidents." "Mr. Dobson," to Henley's mind, "has not the acute critical intelligence of Mr. Stephen," his views are a bit "prim" and "old-fashioned," and he is "scarce so positive as he has the right to be": for an "adequate idea of his hero's place and achievement in fiction the reader must go elsewhere"; but "if he has given no such commanding presentment of Fielding" as "must commend itself to all time," he has shown that previous portraiture "are all in some sort mistaken." Henley again takes the opportunity to assert his own belief in a Fielding who, as evidenced by his solid and carefully wrought books, is an "indefatigable student," a "vigorous magistrate," and a "great and serious artist." This review and the previous one of Stephen's "Memoir," after remaining buried for some years in *The Athenaeum*, finally appeared in revised form as one of the *Views and Reviews* in 1890; and, a decade or so later still, became the basis for Henley's vigorous essay in the edition of 1903. It is safe to say that in these early articles for *The Athenaeum* Henley was distinctly in advance of the prevailing opinion of 1882-1883; certainly he was one of the first competent critics in England who caught the vision of a greater and more radiant Fielding than had ever yet been presented.

The notable fact about the reception of Austin Dobson's attempt to give a saner idea of Fielding the Man was that it met with no violent opposition. Probably the author's mildness

¹⁰ *The Athenaeum*, April 28, 1883, pp. 537-538.

of statement was somewhat responsible for this; but there can be no doubt that the new scientific spirit, with its desire for facts, was clearly manifesting itself in the general attitude. Criticism was passing into the hands of specialists, and Dobson was already recognized as a specialist in the eighteenth century. Quiet and unassuming as it was, his *Fielding*, with its careful investigation of biographical materials, brought about a new era in the reputation of Fielding as a Man, and consequently of Fielding as a Writer. The preface to the volume was dated March, 1883; in September of the same year Miss Margaret Thomas's bust of the novelist was unveiled during a public ceremony in his honor at Taunton. Dobson himself read a poem on Fielding which he had written for this occasion, and James Russell Lowell, then ambassador to England, delivered the address.¹¹ In his verses, as in his memoir, Dobson assumes that there are two Fieldings: one the Fielding of youth, whose errors should be forgiven; the other, the Fielding of "middle-age," who commands our highest admiration. In the following lines it may be seen that the poet is bolder and heartier than the biographer:

Ah, what a wealth of life there is
In that rich, easy page of his!
What store and stock of common-sense,
Wit, laughter, lore, experience!
How his keen satire flashes through,
And cuts a sophistry in two!
How his ironic lightning plays
Around a rogue and all his ways! . . .
He was the first who dared to draw
Mankind the mixture that he saw; . . .
He scorned to drape the truthful nude
With smooth decorous platitude! . . .
[Now] . . . 'neath the green Estrella trees,
No artist merely, but a Man,
Wrought on our noblest island-plan,
Sleeps with the alien Portuguese.¹²

¹¹ *The Magazine of Art*, VI, 371-374.

¹² *The Athenaeum*, September 8, 1883, p. 304.

Excellent as is the portrait depicted in the poem as a whole, we do not here quite catch sight of the Fielding who, in Henry's phrase, disputes the palm with Scott and Thackeray; but it would be invidious to quarrel with one who labored for over a generation to establish a Fielding of fact in place of a Fielding of fiction, and who thoroughly deserved the compliment which Lowell paid him.

Lowell's own tribute¹³ to the novelist on that day (September 4, 1883) contained so much commendation that, as Professor Lounsbury afterwards wrote in the *Century*, "some surprise" was excited by the view he gave of "the character of Fielding," not on account of what he said but of what he omitted to say.¹⁴ *The Saturday Review*, however, in an excellent article on Mr. Lowell's address, highly commended the orator for spending his time upon the genius rather than the life of "England's greatest novelist."¹⁵ The prevailing opinion was that Lowell's speech had been a notable success. In a book by Mr. J. J. Reilly, which appeared several years ago, Lowell is taken to task for his puritanical lack of sympathy in the matter of "realism in the novel"; and it is true that judged entirely by the Taunton address—especially by certain concessions he saw fit to include—something of a case can be made out against him. For example, the "woof" of Fielding's "nature," Lowell believed, was "coarse and animal"; he was "incapable" of "ecstasy"; and his "imagination," though purer, to be sure, than that of the French naturalists, was of a "secondary" order—"subdued to what it worked in." All these things—which are more or less a reflection of the old romantic heresy—are undeniably in the speech. Torn from their context, they give the impression that their author cared little for Henry Fielding,—but that is an utterly erroneous notion. With obvious pleasure Lowell called attention to the

¹³ For an account of the unveiling, with illustrations, see the *London Graphic*, XXVIII, 239, 249 (September 8, 1883). For the Taunton Speech, see *Democracy and Other Addresses*, Boston, 1887.

¹⁴ *The Century Magazine*, XXVII, 635 (February, 1884).

¹⁵ *The Saturday Review*, LVI, 303-304 (September 8, 1883).

praise of Gibbon, Scott, Coleridge, Thackeray, Leslie Stephen, and George Eliot; he declared that Fielding's "habits of study and industry" were "altogether inconsistent with the dissolute life he is supposed to have led"; and, for the correct view of his personality, he referred his hearers to that remarkable and delightful document—*The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*. Though, as Mr. Reilly¹⁶ observes, a good third of the speech is spent in apologizing for Fielding by allowing him the benefit of the age in which he lived, the reason for this is presumably not so much his own imperfect sympathy as the anticipated prejudice of an audience still somewhat Victorian.

"Mr. Lowell," wrote Dobson in 1883, "is known to be an ardent student and admirer of 'The Father of the English Novel'";¹⁷ and certainly anyone who follows the references in the collected works cannot fail to notice that the great poet and critic had a high regard for some of Fielding's most admirable qualities. One of his early criticisms is the following passage taken from a notice of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing* (1858): "Fielding is the only English novelist who deals with life in its broadest sense. Thackeray, his disciple and congener, and Dickens, the congener of Smollett, do not so much treat of life as of the strata of society; the one studying from the club-room window, the other from the reporter's box in the police court. . . . Shakespeare drew ideal, and Fielding natural men and women; Thackeray draws either gentlemen or snobs, and Dickens either unnatural men or the oddities natural only in the lowest grades of a highly artificial system of society. The first two [*i.e.*, Shakespeare and Fielding] knew human nature; of the two latter [*i.e.*, Thackeray and Dickens], one knows what is called the world, and the other the streets of London."¹⁸ The following list of references—in which no attempt is made at complete-

¹⁶ Reilly, J. J., *James Russell Lowell as a Critic*, New York, 1915, p. 116; see also pp. 99, 100.

¹⁷ *The Magazine of Art*, VI, 371.

¹⁸ C. E. Stowe's *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Boston and New York, 1890, pp. 328-329.

ness—may be given for what it is worth. In the 'Forties, young Lowell wrote (1847) C. F. Briggs that Fielding had "vastly more *conception* of humor than Dickens, and Dickens vastly more *observation* of humor than Fielding";¹⁹ and in the *Fable for Critics* (1848) he was already referring to his favorite Parson Adams. In the 'Fifties he made the extended criticism which we have just transcribed; and in the 'Sixties he alluded to the novelist again and again. On one occasion he speaks of Adams's unpublished sermons; on another, he declares that while Shakespeare was unrivalled for the "true sense of humor," Fielding approached him in his thorough humanity.²⁰ In 1865 he dwells upon the idea that "Fielding, Sterne, and Wordsworth" all represent "the reaction and revolt against *Philis-terei*."²¹ In 1866 he asserts that the "humor of Swift and Sterne and Fielding, after filtering through Richter," reappears "in Carlyle";²² and in another passage he commends Squire Western's "Art not in the pulpit now!"²³ In 1867 he makes the statement, in a letter to C. E. Norton, that "Fielding's coarseness belongs to his time," while "Smollett's is of all time."²⁴ In 1868 he says that the "exquisite analysis of complex motives," which constitutes the "abiding charm of fiction," reached its "height in Cervantes and Shakespeare"; and, "though on a lower plane," is to be found in an "upper region of art in Le Sage, Molière, and Fielding."²⁵ And in 1870 he declares that for the "suavity," the "perpetual presence," and the "shy unobtrusiveness" of the humor of Chaucer we must wait for his "prose antitype,"²⁶ Henry Fielding. It is highly probable that Lowell was much less disturbed over

¹⁹ *Letters of . . . Lowell*, edited by C. E. Norton, New York, 1894, I, 118.

²⁰ *The Complete Works of . . . Lowell*, Fireside ed., Boston and New York, 1910, I, 317, 278.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, 363-364.

²² *Ibid.*, II, 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, 217.

²⁴ *Letters of . . . Lowell*, I, 391.

²⁵ *The Complete Works*, III, 57-58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 321, 364.

the "morality" of Fielding's novels than might be inferred from a reading of the Taunton speech. Had this not been the case he would hardly have suggested to Harriet Beecher Stowe (she is said to have been scandalized!) that she might "improve her art by reading 'Tom Jones.'"²⁷ Though he found pleasure in romance rather than in realism and honestly felt that Fielding's imagination was of the secondary or unpoetic order, his admiration, to judge from the evidence, began early and continued late. As in many other instances in this history, Fielding's genius in Lowell's final assessment rose to a higher pitch than ever before. In the noble "Inscription for a Memorial Bust of Fielding" (published in *The Atlantic Monthly* for September, 1890) we find no disfiguring qualification such as the English parson felt impelled to insert in *his* inscription sixty years before—only the spontaneous and admiring recognition of a brother craftsman who like himself esteemed a kindly heart above all "riches, or worldly power."

He looked on naked Nature unashamed,
And saw the Sphinx, now bestial, now divine,
In change and rechange; he nor praised nor blamed,
But drew her as he saw with fearless line.
Did he good service? God must judge, not we;
Manly he was, and generous and sincere;
English in all, of genius blithely free:
Who loves a Man may see his image here.²⁸

Apropos of the unveiling of the Fielding bust, a writer in *The Saturday Review* declared that "so far as we remember" there had been "no speech-making over any bust" of "Richardson and Smollett."²⁹ This interesting fact was made by H. D. Traill the basis of a clever Lucianic dialogue between Fielding and Richardson, in which the latter is represented as consumed with jealousy on account of the honors which have just been paid his rival. For the witty give-and-take of this

²⁷ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 230.

²⁸ *The Atlantic Monthly*, LXVI, 322.

²⁹ *The Saturday Review*, LVI, 303 (September 8, 1883).

skit, one must read the dialogue itself. The following excerpt, in which Fielding is made to defend his art very soberly, gives an inadequate impression of the lightness of the piece as a whole; but it is included here to show the increasing friendliness toward realism which was coming about in 1884. "I cannot see," runs the passage, "that virtue is any better served by feigning a false certainty for its earthly prizes, than by teaching men what is strictly true,—that it need not despair of its recompense even though it be mingled with vice. Besides . . . how is it possible for a faithful delineator of human life to do otherwise than I have done? Are not good and evil mingled in life, and are not those who look upon life—I speak not now of boarding-school misses, but of men and women of the world—are they not, I say, perpetually conscious of the mixture? Do they not see too that the tares and wheat . . . are allowed to grow together until the harvest, and that the tares sometimes flourish a plaguy deal better than the wheat?"³⁰ Traill, the author of this dialogue, fought in the great novelist's cause on more than one occasion thereafter.

Interest in the works of Fielding was now manifesting itself in many a casual reference by professed students of English literature. Later in the same year in which Dobson's book appeared, A. H. Bullen, in an edition of *Peter Wilkins*, called upon the reading public to take up again the books which Lamb and Leigh Hunt "loved to praise," and to "exult in the full-blooded, bracing life which pulses in the pages of Fielding."³¹ John Churton Collins, a careful investigator in the eighteenth-century field, spoke of Fielding in his *Bolingbroke* (1886) as "the prince of English novelists."³² Dowden,

³⁰ Traill, H. D., *The New Lucian*, London, 1884, pp. 200-215.

³¹ Bullen's preface (dated November, 1883) to an edition of Paltock's *Peter Wilkins*, London, 1884, I, xviii.

³² Collins, J. C., *Bolingbroke*, New York, 1886, p. 182. In his "Present Functions of Criticism" (see *Ephemera Critica*, 1901, p. 28), Collins's estimate of Fielding is implied in the statement that if criticism "has to take the measure of Mr. Hall Caine, it has likewise to take the measure of Cervantes and Fielding."

in his account of Goldsmith (1883), regarded *Tom Jones* as the "broadest and brightest study" in that period of "the *comédie humaine*."³³ And in 1884, Professor Lounsbury, who felt that the real Fielding should be derived from the books rather than from hearsay, made a strong plea in *The Century Magazine* for something nearer a complete edition than had as yet appeared.³⁴

Before long, news of the Fielding revival had reached the theatres. It was in 1886 that Robert Buchanan produced a new dramatic rendering of *Tom Jones* in a play entitled "Sophia,"³⁵ which was followed in 1888 by a version of Fielding's first novel under the caption, "Joseph's Sweetheart." A writer in *The Saturday Review* (for April 17, 1886) made sport of the "distortions" which Buchanan had introduced in "Sophia"; yet the fact remains that despite an unpropitious beginning, this play held the boards consecutively for "over five hundred nights." "Joseph's Sweetheart" was also successful, running for more than "three hundred and fifty" nights. Both plays were, of course, remote enough from their originals; but undoubtedly many who witnessed them turned, sooner or later, the pages of that "supreme genius"³⁶—to use Buchanan's words—who was their inspiration. The prologue to "Joseph's Sweetheart," spoken by Lady Booby, runs in part:

Then rose Sophia at Fielding's conjuration,
Like Venus from the sea—of affectation.
Then madcap Tom showed, in his sport and passion,
A man's a man for a' that, 'spite the fashion.
Then Parson Adams, type of honest worth,
Born of the pure embrace of Love and Mirth,
Smiled in the English sunshine, proving clear
That one true heart is worth a world's veneer!

³³ Dowden, E., "Oliver Goldsmith," in T. H. Ward's *English Poets*, London and New York, 1880, III, 368.

³⁴ *The Century Magazine*, XXVII, 635.

³⁵ For the cast, see *The Graphic*, April 17, 1886.

³⁶ For a detailed account of the plays, see Harriet Jay's *Robert Buchanan*, London, 1903, pp. 237-240.

After these many years, then, the characters of Fielding's novels—rehabilitated for a later time—were again playing their rôles on the English stage. In the prologue from which we have just quoted, the voice of the spurious Cawthorn of the Poet's Corner in *The Gentleman's Magazine* was heard again:

Off fell the mask that darken'd and concealed
Life's face, and Human Nature stood revealed!³⁷

And at least one nineteenth-century Poet's Corner was redolent of Fielding's new springtime:

The trophies of his genius blaze
Through three half-centuries of haze—
We hear the very larks that trilled
When Fielding wrote.³⁸

Saintsbury and Gosse—whose editions of the novelist were to appear in the next decade—were already speaking appreciatively of him; and Andrew Lang, another great lover of the author, had written that excellent passage—which everyone knows—on Fielding's style. Fielding's style, in fact, was now entering upon a new career of praise. As early as 1885, Professor Saintsbury took occasion to commend his prose in the preface to Craik's *Specimens*. Up to that time, the honor of being regarded as a stylist was one which had not been generally conferred upon him; only within the past generation have excerpts from Fielding been at all common in anthologies of English prose. In his preface, Saintsbury, attacking the old charge of pedantry (which, popular at the end of the eighteenth century, had been revived by Thackeray) boldly declared that "The great genius of Fielding . . . was from nothing so averse as from everything that had the semblance or the reality of pretension, pedantry, or conceit."³⁹ But the

³⁷ Harriet Jay's *Robert Buchanan*, p. 239. Cawthorn's verses had appeared in Dobson's *Fielding*.

³⁸ *The Critic* (New York), IX (N.S.), 183 (April, 1888).

³⁹ *Specimens of English Prose Style*, London, 1885, p. xxvi.

best characterization of Fielding's style came from the pen of Andrew Lang, who, in his *Letters on Literature*, gave an especially happy turn to Murphy's figure of the river as adapted by Walter Scott. "There is somewhat inexpressibly heartening, to me," he says, "in the style of Fielding. One seems to be carried along, like a swimmer in a strong, clear, stream, trusting one's self to every whirl and eddy, with a feeling of safety, of comfort, or delightful ease in the motion of the elastic water."⁴⁰

Edmund Gosse, in his *History of English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, also commends Fielding as "a prose writer," instancing the initial essays, which, as he observes, were imitated not only by Thackeray but "by George Eliot." His general estimate of Fielding is not, indeed, so eloquent as it became later; nor can he join with Thackeray in warmly praising *Amelia*. "Those who have preferred *Amelia* to its predecessors" must have been "over-enchanted," he says, "by the character of its patient and saintly heroine, without whom the book would fall to pieces," for many of the incidents "are crudely introduced." To his mind, Booth—"on whom it can scarcely be doubted that the world has unjustly built its conception of Fielding himself"—is "very natural and human, but unstable to the last degree, and noticeably stupid"; and—though "humane and tender"—the novel on the whole is "a little dull." But for all that, its author is the "greatest of English novelists": Parson Adams, "alone, would be a contribution to English letters"; *Jonathan Wild*—never "a favourite" because of its "caustic cynicism and the unbroken gloom of its tone"—is "equal to the best" Fielding "has left us in force and originality"; and in *Tom Jones* the "winds of heaven blow along the pages" and the "stage is filled" with the "healthiest company ever devised by a human brain."⁴¹

Dobson's biography, then, marks a turning point in Field-

⁴⁰ Andrew Lang's *Letters on Literature*, London and New York, 1889, p. 38.

⁴¹ Gosse, E., *A History of English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1889.

ing's reputation. But it may be doubted whether such an unobtrusive book would have had so great an effect a decade or two earlier; it is not overstating the case to say that it appeared in the very nick of time. The critics of the new generation who were now settling down to work disparaged neither the novel nor the century that inaugurated it. Not only Dobson but Henley, Saintsbury, Gosse, Lang, and many others—all well disposed toward Fielding—sincerely desired to bring about a saner appreciation of his achievement. And surely there was work for them to do; for the old stories still persisted. A case in point is the "sketch" (1889) of Fielding's life prepared for the "Illustrated Sterling Edition"—a queer, rhapsodical compilation,⁴² in which exceptional praise is mingled with exceptional calumny. The writer, Alfred Trumble, recalling Thackeray, tells us that Fielding was "an honest man . . . generous as just, kindly, considerate, unselfish," whether in "his cups" or "in the sober senses which brought him . . . anguish and remorse." Elaborating upon the Walpole story, he represents him, even when a magistrate, as "reckless and given to excess"—so lacking in "personal dignity" that he prefers "low company"; and draws for us a fancy picture of the Justice sitting "in dirty ruffles and tarnished and threadbare garb, with red eyes and jaundiced face." On account of its author's debts and duns and "headaches," he wonders that *Amelia* can be as good as it is. No previous editor had added just this touch—that the novelist was "red-eyed" with drink. A more out-and-out disparager of Fielding was the romantic author of *John Inglesant*. Though Shorthouse praises the character of *Amelia* for a "purity which walks unspotted through evil of every kind," he condemns *Tom Jones* as "nature in its lowest form." He draws a long and far-fetched parallel between Tom and the Prodigal Son, and refers to the former as a stupid body "who draws his tedious

⁴² A "Sketch" of Fielding's life signed "Alfred Trumble," August, 1889, in the *Jonathan Wild* volume of the "Illustrated Sterling Edition," Boston [*n.d.*].

and dirty steps through a slough of . . . filth."⁴³ Later still, we have a characterization of Fielding and his works by the popular writer of the *Reveries of a Bachelor*. Mitchell acknowledges that Dobson's *Life* is "more trustworthy" than that of Scott, yet he deliberately views his subject through the "charming retrospective glasses of Thackeray"; therefore he elaborates upon the "inked ruffles" and the "wet towel," and represents the Great Ironist as a "jovial, kind-hearted, rollicking, dare-devil of a man, with no great guile in him," whose works—for "filth is filth"—are tainted by "the bestialities of such tavern-bagnios as poor Fielding knew too well."⁴⁴ Assuredly *Tom Jones* had a hard name; only after legal action in 1894 was a certain book company permitted "to sell" copies of *Tom Jones*, *Rabelais*, and *The Decameron*.⁴⁵

But against such representations as these Fielding's defenders now came trooping. Fittingly enough the new decade had been ushered in by Henley's *Views and Reviews* (1890), which, though merely a revised reprint of the criticisms on Stephen and Dobson seven or eight years before, was now, because of its book form, of the author's increased reputation as a critic, and of the general movement—since Dobson—toward a more rational outlook on Fielding, to become a rather influential document. While retouching his criticisms Henley could still exclaim as before: "There is enough of sustained intellectual effort" in "certain chapters" of *Jonathan Wild* "to furnish forth a hundred modern novels; but you only think of Fielding reeling home from the Rose"; and could declare that the "consequence of all these exercises in sentiment and imagination has been that, while many have been ready to deal

⁴³ "The Humorous in Literature" (*Macmillan's Magazine*, March, 1883), in the *Literary Remains of J. H. Shorthouse*, London, 1905, II, 262, 263, 278-280.

⁴⁴ D. G. Mitchell's *English Lands, Letters, and Kings*, New York, 1895, III, 70, 68, 67.

⁴⁵ *The Critic* (New York), XXIV, 444. "Not long ago," writes W. L. George, "the Municipal Libraries of Doncaster and Dewsbury banished *Tom Jones*."—*A Novelist on Novels*, London, 1918, p. 126.

with Fielding as the text for a sermon . . . as the point of a moral or the adornment of a tale, few have cared to think of him as worthy to dispute the palm with Cervantes and Sir Walter as the heroic man of letters."⁴⁶ Certainly such persons were now more numerous, however, and the reaction against Thackeray was becoming more and more palpable. In 1891, Mr. Quiller-Couch⁴⁷ (now Sir Arthur), objecting to Mr. Marzial's praise of the *English Humourists*, characterizes its author as "a volunteer constable—determined to warn his polite hearers what sort of men these were whose books they had hitherto read unsuspectingly." The Fielding that Thackeray presents to us, he says, is a "purely fictitious low comedian." Of like opinion is Professor Saintsbury, who, notwithstanding his admiration for Thackeray, deals rather firmly with him. In the general introduction to his edition (1893) of Fielding's works, he writes as follows: "Partly on the *obiter dicta* of persons like these [*i.e.*, Lady Mary, Walpole, Richardson, and Johnson], partly on the still more tempting and still more treacherous ground of indications drawn from his works, a Fielding of fantasy has been constructed, which in Thackeray's admirable sketch attains real life and immortality as a creature of art, but which possesses rather dubious claims as a historical character. It is astonishing how this Fielding of fantasy sinks and shrivels when we begin to apply the horrid tests of criticism" to "component parts"—this "*eidolon*, with inked ruffles and a towel round his head."⁴⁸

Nothing could better illustrate the changing attitude toward Fielding which was now coming about than the clash of arms which resulted from Stevenson's attack⁴⁹ on *Tom Jones* in *Scribner's Magazine* for June, 1888. In this article Stevenson

⁴⁶ Henley's *Views and Reviews: Literature*, London, 1890, p. 231.

⁴⁷ Quiller-Couch, A., *Adventures in Criticism*, London, 1896, pp. 91, 92.

⁴⁸ Fielding's *Works*, edited by Saintsbury, London, 1893, I, xxii-xxiii (Introduction to *Joseph Andrews*).

⁴⁹ Among Fielding's defenders was J. A. Steuart.—*Letters to Living Authors*, new ed., London, 1892, pp. 14, 168, 208.

labors to maintain the paradox that while as a man Fielding was "a gentleman" and Richardson "undeniably was not," as an author the case was just the reverse—an "odd inversion." Therefore he finds Lovelace a gentleman "of undisputed quality," while "in *Tom Jones*, with its voluminous bulk and troops of characters, there is no shadow of a gentleman, for Allworthy is only ink and paper." Parson Adams, he says, "has no pretension 'to the genteel'"; and in *Amelia*, though "things get better"—for "Booth and Dr. Harrison will pass in a crowd"—Dr. Harrison among Richardson's elegant people would have "seemed a plain, honest man, a trifle below his company; while poor Booth" would have "been glad to slink away with Mowbray and crack a bottle in the butler's room." And how, pray, do gentlemen act? Stevenson tells us: "They have a gallant, a conspicuous carriage; they roll into the book, four in hand, in gracious attitudes." It "is one of the curiosities of literature," says Stevenson, "that Fielding, who wrote one book that was engaging, truthful, kind, and clean, and another book that was dirty, dull, and false, should be spoken of, the world over, as the author of the second and not the first, as the author of *Tom Jones*, not of *Amelia*."⁵⁰ Even Augustine Birrell—who was so fond of Richardson as to make the amazing statement that the printer did "more good every week of his life" than "Fielding was ever able to do throughout the whole of his"⁵¹—regarded Stevenson's own *dictum* as a "curiosity of literature"; criticism was in a vastly precarious state, he said, when *Tom Jones* could be characterized as "dull." In 1893 the battle was still raging, with the odds in Fielding's favor. *The Saturday Review* of April 22, commenting on the "little controversy, of a kind beloved by the aggressively Pure," that "has arisen over the morals of *Tom Jones*," declares that Stevenson's assertion to the effect that *Tom Jones* is both "dull and dirty," causes "the eyes of amazement to

⁵⁰ Stevenson, R. L., "Some Gentlemen in Fiction," in *Scribner's Magazine*, III, 766.

⁵¹ A. Birrell's "Samuel Richardson" (1892), in *Res Judicatae*, New York, 1892, p. 7.

open wide." Fielding's "real position," continues the reviewer, was to correct an attitude of mind in which "a prodigious pother" is made "about one single point of conduct," while "generosity, kindness, charity, goodness of heart—are almost neglected."⁵² It is to this controversy that Professor Saintsbury refers in the general introduction from which we quoted a moment ago. "Just when the first sheets of this edition were passing through the press" (1893), he writes, "a violent attack was made in a newspaper correspondence on the morality of *Tom Jones* by certain notorious advocates of Purity, as some say, of Pruriency and Prudery combined, according to less complimentary estimates."⁵³ Of the latter opinion were many of the fiction-writers of the day, among them Marion Crawford, who says: "That our prevailing moral literary purity is to some extent assumed . . . is shown by the undeniable fact that women who blush scarlet, and men who feel an odd sensation of repulsion in reading some pages of 'Tom Jones' . . . are not conscious of any particular shock when their sensibilities are attacked in French. Some of them call Zola a 'pig' . . . but read all his books industriously."⁵⁴

Instead of repeating the time-worn slanders of Thackeray and others, critics were now more and more inclining toward actual investigation. There was, for example, the venerable sneer at what Thackeray was pleased to call Fielding's "two-penny learning," a libel which runs back to the days of "Orbilius" and other Grub Street enemies. This ancient fallacy, which had done particular damage since the days of *The English Humourists*, received a considerable set-back when Austin Dobson, ever busy, fortunately discovered the "Catalogue of the entire and valuable Library of Books of the Late Henry Fielding, Esq.," and called the attention of the public (in 1895) to the size and quality of the collection which Fielding

⁵² *The Saturday Review*, LXXV, 421.

⁵³ Fielding's *Works*, I, xxv.

⁵⁴ Crawford, M., *The Novel: What it is*, London and New York, 1893, pp. 38-39. Not so Holmes, who, though repudiating Zola, pleasantly refers (in his *Autocrat*) to *Tom Jones*.

had accumulated and which he had turned to such good advantage during his lifetime. After discussing in detail the contents of the library, Dobson comes to the following conclusion: "When it is found that in his youth Fielding had been a fervent student of the classics, that he remained throughout life a voracious reader; and that his works everywhere afford confirmation of both these things, it is perhaps not unreasonable to conclude that he made good use of the large collection of Greek and Latin authors which he left behind him at his death, and that he was, in reality, the scholar he has been affirmed to be. In any case, the evidence of his learning is a hundred times better than most of that which for years past has been industriously brought forward in regard to some of the less worshipful incidents of his career."⁵⁵ Accordingly Professor Cross, who has recently gone over the matter in greater detail and has emphasized the proper inferences which should be drawn regarding the novelist's scholarship, declares that "Fielding acquired the largest working library possessed by any man of letters in the eighteenth century, surpassing even Dr. Johnson's."⁵⁶ As early as the 'Nineties, Dobson's discovery gave the signal for a new evaluation of Fielding as a scholar. Edmund Gosse, for example, wrote as follows: "A singularly false conception of Fielding prevails, as of a rude and rustic talent, without training, without the humanities. Even Thackeray has sneered at . . . his 'two-penny learning.' . . . But our conception of him is imperfect at the outset if we do not realize that he was preëminently one of those great English writers who have owed their start-word to a sound classical scholarship. Fielding was the type of the well-educated country gentleman, taught at Eton, trained at Leyden, elegantly proficient in the modern languages. But he was more than this: he was 'uncommonly versed in the Greek authors,' and when all other intellectual comforts failed, his Plato accompanied him on the last sad voyage to Lisbon. His library,

⁵⁵ *Bibliographica*, Vol. I, 1895, pp. 163-173; reprinted in *Eighteenth Century Vignettes*, third series, 1896, pp. 164-178.

⁵⁶ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 77.

which was poor in light literature, was rich in editions of Lucian and Aristophanes, and his statement of what he owed to the Greeks was no such 'absurd brag' as hasty criticism has affected to think it."⁵⁷

If Fielding was, after all, a scholar, the inference followed that his initial essays might deserve more careful consideration than they had ever before received. *Fin de siècle* critics turned again to the prolegomenous chapters; and the question of their legitimacy and their effectiveness—a topic which from the beginning had been heatedly discussed—was, at the end of the nineteenth century, nearer a solution than ever before. One reason for this, presumably, is to be found in the popularity given to interpolated commentary by Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith, and Henry James. George Eliot's own praise of Fielding's inter-chapters was frequently quoted. There were critics, of course, who complained that any intervention on the part of the author himself spoils the illusion; but since Stephen's defense of the "chorus" in the early 'Eighties; that is, since the beginning of the new actual study of the novelist's art, Fielding's practice had been more generally defended. By the new school of critics, with whom the "author's purpose" became a slogan, Fielding's own intention (*i.e.*, to fuse drama, epic, and essay in one great narrative vehicle for the criticism of life) was more commonly understood, and it was often conceded that the essay element further justified its use by charm of expression. As Andrew Lang remarked in 1898, Dickens's attempts in this way "never won an excuse by a style like that of Thackeray or Fielding."⁵⁸ No one but "a child," wrote Leslie Stephen, could find his delight in the progress of the story really destroyed by the writer's judicious commentary. We may observe, moreover, that the use of initial essays can be justified by the principle of variety (Fielding's own contention), particularly in an immense architectural plan like that of *Tom Jones*. They can also be defended,

⁵⁷ Edmund Gosse's Introduction to *The Works of Henry Fielding*, I, xv.

⁵⁸ *The Fortnightly Review*, LXIV (N.S.), 954.

as Professor Winchester has pointed out, on the score that they give a certain "objective reality"⁵⁹ to the persons and events which they discuss. "Some recent English novelists . . .," wrote Professor Cross in 1899, "who have learned the technique of their art from the French, find it against their literary conscience to indulge in the excursus. . . . But in Fielding's large conception of a novel, these introductory chapters form a distinctive part; they are the chorus of the drama interpreting the meaning of the passing incidents, or they are the monologues and asides of the author turned player when he wishes to take the audience into his confidence."⁶⁰

When George Eliot spoke of the "lusty ease" of Fielding's "fine English," she was thinking mainly of his "initial chapters"; a consideration of these miniature essays very naturally resulted—with an unprejudiced reader—in an increased attention to the author's style. Thus it happened that at the end of the century, after Stevenson had drawn especial notice to beauty of pattern, and when—as never before—critics of literature became interested in English prose style, Fielding's power of expression was subjected to a more thorough inspection than it had previously received. That his rating as a stylist went steadily higher must be regarded as a substantial triumph. Perceptible in the 'Eighties, the new movement had advanced very greatly by the following decade. "As a master of style," wrote Henry Craik,⁶¹ in 1895, "Fielding has a claim on our admiration, apart from all the other attributes of his genius. It seems strange in regard to Fielding to set aside all the wealth of human sympathy, all the range of humour, all the vividness of character-drawing, and to restrict ourselves solely to the one aspect that interests us here, his place as a writer of prose. His style reflects much that is distinctive of his genius, its massive carelessness, its strong simplicity, its clearness of

⁵⁹ Winchester, C. T., *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*, New York, 1899, p. 306.

⁶⁰ *Development of the English Novel*, p. 48.

⁶¹ Henry Craik's introduction to *English Prose Selections*, New York, 1895, IV, 10.

outline, and its consummate ease. But above all things" he represents "two leading characteristics of his age, its irony and its scholarship. Fielding was from first to last a man of letters, as the character was conceived in his time—without pedantry, without strain, without the constraint of subtlety, but always imbued with the instinct of the scholar, never forgetting that, in the full rush of his exuberant fancy and his audacious humour, he must give to his style that indescribable quality that makes it permanent, that forces us to place it in the first rank of literary effort, that, even when irregular, pleads for no allowance on the score of neglect of art. He challenges comparison on merely literary grounds with the best models of literary art, and he is no loser by the comparison." In the same volume, Professor Saintsbury dwelt upon the service which Fielding had rendered English fiction by his "mighty merits of power and range" of expression;⁶² while J. H. Millar wrote, "We are not, indeed, to look to Richardson for that nameless quality of style which is the property of a scholar and a gentleman such as Fielding was."⁶³ Three years before, even Mr. Birrell had allowed Richardson's competitor a "superb lusty style" (presumably a reminiscence of George Eliot) which "carries you along like a pair of horses over a level moorland road."⁶⁴ In 1896, J. H. Lobban commended (in his *English Essays*) Fielding's "vigorous easy style" and "good-humoured racy wit." "Thackeray . . .," wrote Herbert Paul, during the following year, "cannot quite be said to have made the novel literary. Fielding with his ripe scholarship and his magnificent sweep of diction, was beforehand with him."⁶⁵ Edmund Gosse, perhaps thinking of Andrew Lang, praises the "vitality and elastic vigour" of the language of *Joseph Andrews*.⁶⁶ And a reviewer in *The Academy*, writing of the status of the novelist in the year 1898, asserts that

⁶² Craik's *English Prose*, IV, 114, 115.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV, 58.

⁶⁴ *Res Judicatae*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Paul, Herbert, *The Victorian Novel*, London, 1897, p. 127.

⁶⁶ Gosse, E., *The Works of Henry Fielding*, I, xxvi.

whatever else critics may quarrel about they are unanimous in declaring Fielding to be "the greatest master of narrative style who ever wrote in the English tongue. The supple, sinewy strength of the sentences; their apparent ease and simplicity; their real force and expression and mastery are unapproached."⁶⁷ In his initial essays, wrote Professor Cross in 1899, Fielding "found a place for that poetry which the Euphuists tried to incorporate into fiction"; the passage on Sophia, in his judgment, reaching "the high-water mark of restrained eloquence."⁶⁸

From the fact that so many writers were looking minutely into the style of Fielding, it may be inferred that fiction had now become the object of serious study. Such was, indeed, the case. It was in 1884 that Walter Besant, Stevenson, and Henry James took part in their celebrated triangular controversy on the "Art of Fiction," during which Besant, by the way, always a lover of the novelist—whose works he had already turned to account in *The Chaplain of the Fleet*—ignored Richardson and Smollett and listed the "great Masters" as "Fielding, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Victor Hugo."⁶⁹ James, also, had an eye on Fielding, classing him (at a later time) with Shakespeare and Cervantes as one of the "fine painters of life," and particularly admiring the "amplitude of reflexion" of this man who was "handsomely possessed of a mind." We see the character of the unimaginative Tom Jones, he remarks, "through the mellow air of Fielding's fine old moralism, fine old humour and fine old style, which somehow really enlarge, make every one and every thing important."⁷⁰

In the 'Nineties the English novel, belatedly taking its place in college curricula (at least in America), was at last securing attention from trained investigators within academic walls as

⁶⁷ *The Academy*, LIII, 128 (signed "P").

⁶⁸ *Development of the English Novel*, p. 48.

⁶⁹ See his *Art of Fiction* (April 25, 1884). In *The Chaplain of the Fleet* by Besant and Rice, London, 1881, there are many references; for example, I, 307, 308, 309; II, 128, 200, 259; III, 10.

⁷⁰ *The Princess Casamassima*, New York, 1908, I, xii, xiii, xiv.

well as without. Significantly enough, there appeared during this decade two notable works on fiction—Raleigh's *English Novel* (1894), which ended with Walter Scott; and Cross's *Development of the English Novel* (1899), which covered the entire field. One has only to look back through previous treatises to realize the striking change in breadth and sanity that was now coming about. Even the excellent Tuckerman in 1882, who did better by Fielding than previous historians of fiction, was so greatly influenced by Taine that he found the "tone" of the great novels—then "unfit for general perusal"—merely a "rollicking, careless joyousness."⁷¹ Unlike most of their predecessors, both Professor (later Sir Walter) Raleigh and Professor Cross approach their subject in a spirit of disinterested inquiry; with them *Tom Jones* is not a scape-grace because Fielding's ethical notions were "tainted" or "blunted" by his life, nor do they express the wish that the work might be blotted "from the face of the earth." The Lady Bellaston incident, according to Raleigh, only "lays a strong emphasis on the main theme of the book, and makes its intellectual framework all the clearer."⁷² In *Tom Jones*, writes Cross,⁷³ "the novel not only definitely assumes a new form, but a new ethics much more respectable than that founded upon utilitarianism and formulated in 'beautiful and edifying maxims.'" Fielding had said,⁷⁴ "I have shown that no acquisitions of guilt can compensate the loss of that solid inward comfort of mind, which is the sure companion of innocence and virtue; nor can in the least balance the evil of that horror and anxiety which, in their room, guilt introduces into our bosoms." Here we have, as Cross points out, "a complete repudiation of Richardson, if not of Addison; the point of view has shifted from . . . doing to being, and the shifting means

⁷¹ B. Tuckerman's *History of English Prose Fiction*, New York, 1882, pp. 203 ff.

⁷² W. Raleigh's *English Novel*, London, 1894, p. 174.

⁷³ *Development of the English Novel*, pp. 51, 50.

⁷⁴ Dedication to *Tom Jones*, Henley edition, III, 12.

war against formalism." Very different, this, from the hereditary comparisons between Richardson the moralist and Fielding the profligate! *Tom Jones*, declares Professor Raleigh, is Fielding's "sonorous verdict on human life and human conduct. Whether regarded for its art or for its thought, whether treated as detached scenes of the human comedy, as an example of plot-architecture, or as an attempt at the solution of certain wide problems of life, no truer, saner book has ever been written. Indeed, to borrow the words of the American poet, 'this is no book; who touches this touches a man.'" Raleigh cannot refrain from adding, in view of the old stories about the novelist still current at the century-end: "The very qualities that have been foremost in finding Fielding enemies (if those who waste their time in apologizing for him, allowing him the benefit of the age in which he lived, and pitying him, may be so called) have also found him the warmest friends. His splendid candour, his magnanimity, his tolerance, spring from no ignorance or indifference; he is keenly sensitive to minute traits of character, and merciless to meanness." Then, as a parting shot, comes this statement: "Books are written to be read by those who can understand them; their possible effect on those who cannot is a matter of medical rather than of literary interest." As may well be imagined, the position taken by Professor Cross and Professor Raleigh in what were to become standard treatises on fiction for college classes as well as for the general public, was one of the most influential factors in establishing a truer evaluation of Fielding's achievement. And there can be no better evidence of the high quality of that achievement than the fact that under the disinterested and comparative method of the specialist his rating even more palpably outdistanced that of his famous contemporaries.

One of the most important features of the great awakening as regards prose fiction in general and Henry Fielding in particular, was a better understanding and appreciation of the art of the realist. It is true that W. D. Howells had little use for Fielding, whose *Amelia* and *Sophia* found no place in the

Heroines of Fiction (1901) and whose coarseness⁷⁵ barred him from that writer's *Literary Passions*. Even George Gissing, commenting (1898) upon the novels read by young Dickens, declares that "these old novelists are strong food," though he thinks "a boy who is to enrich the literature of the world may well be nourished upon them."⁷⁶ But the comparison invited by the works of Zola and his followers threw a new light on the realism of Fielding. The difference between the two writers (noted earlier by Brunetière and Leslie Stephen) was now much more generally recognized than ever before. In 1892, Brander Matthews, for instance, apropos of Zola's lack of "joyousness and humour," particularly commended the love which Fielding, as a true follower of Cervantes, bore "the children of his brain"; Thackeray, in his opinion, did not follow his master closely in this respect, or he would never have "pursued" and "harried" Becky Sharp.⁷⁷ In 1894, attention⁷⁸ had been called to Fielding's inclusion in *Amelia* of *real* children, whose "prattle is natural," and who constantly illustrate "in the most innocent fashion the steadfastness" of their beloved mother. In fact, so often during this period (while the public was reading Zola) did Fielding have the preference with the reviewers that, in the words of J. M. Robertson—who held a brief for the Frenchman—the "same journals" which lifted their "hands" at the "passionless science" of Zola glossed over the "leering prurience"⁷⁹ of Fielding. In 1899 Cross drew the line distinctly and finally between French naturalism and the realism of Fielding by showing how a naturalistic writer would have handled the

⁷⁵ Howells's "Henry James, Jr.," in *The Century Magazine*, XXV, 28 (November, 1882).

⁷⁶ George Gissing's *Charles Dickens*, New York, 1904, p. 27.

⁷⁷ Matthews, Brander, *Aspects of Fiction*, New York, 1896, pp. 180, 171.

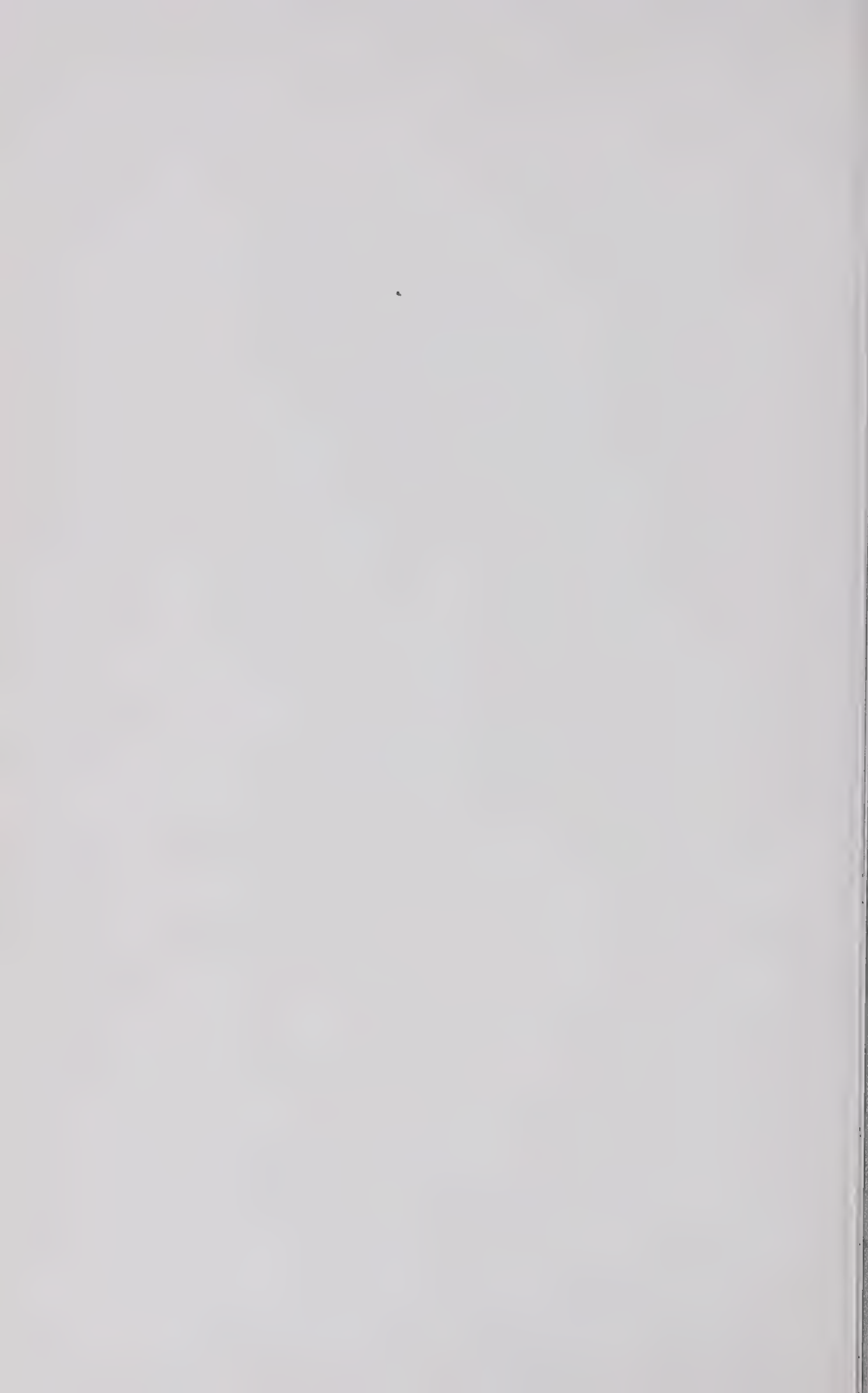
⁷⁸ By H. E. Scudder in *Childhood in Literature and Art*, 1894, p. 135.

⁷⁹ Robertson, J. M., *Essays towards a Critical Method*, London, 1889, p. 137.



AMELIA.
The affecting interview between Amelia
and her children on their being brought
to her during their father's imprisonment.
Vol. II. Book II. Chap. 3. Page 139.

AMELIA AND HER CHILDREN



theme of *Amelia*—by transporting Booth “to the West Indies,” and turning “Amelia with her children into the street” or giving “her over as mistress to Colonel James”—a procedure which, as he justly observes, the “infinite tenderness” of the English author prevented.⁸⁰ This appreciation of Fielding’s realism sounds very different from the talk of Sidney Lanier, or—to go back a generation or two—the grumblings of the idealistic Northcote or those of the sentimental Fitzgerald. Bliss Perry, defending realism in 1902, declared that Lanier’s outburst was “rather tropical language for a professed critic.”

“Without claiming for a moment that eighteenth century fiction shows perfect art or a perfect morality,” he writes, “we may still assert that it is just as legitimate for a novelist to base his work upon human nature as it is, as upon human nature as he would wish it to be.” Fielding, he continues, “is quite capable of fighting his own battles. His readers will gladly sacrifice ‘the sublilities’ if they may be allowed to observe Partridge in the theatre,” or *Amelia* “more Amiable than Gay.” “Such writing endures.”⁸¹ Also of this opinion was Professor Saintsbury, who emphatically insisted some years later that “The art that re-creates the model is certainly not less great than the art that invents out of the head.”⁸² It need hardly be said that the recognition of the greatness of the art of the realist as compared with that of the romantic idealist forms one of the most important modern contributions to the study of fiction.

Fielding’s tenderness, thus revealed by students of the novel, was seen more clearly than ever before by reason of the virtual reclamation, during the last years of the century, of the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*. In 1892 Austin Dobson

⁸⁰ *Development of the English Novel*, pp. 56-57. To Coventry Patmore “there are few things so pathetic in literature as the story of the supper” and *Amelia*’s “noble reticence.”—*Principle in Art*, London, n.d., p. 33.

⁸¹ Bliss Perry’s *Study of Prose Fiction*, Boston and New York, 1902, pp. 234-235.

⁸² Saintsbury, G., *Fielding* (“Masters of Literature”), London, 1909, p. xxvi.

brought out an edition of the work in a separate volume, prefacing it with an excellent introduction, in which he drew attention to the two forms in which the book had appeared and suggested the solution to a rather puzzling question. At the end of his essay he wrote, "In short, if the 'Voyage to Lisbon' be not" Fielding's "best work, at least it gives a picture of fortitude, of cheerful patience, of manly endurance under trial, which may be fairly described as unexampled in our literature." "Many men," he continues, "begin life as wildly and recklessly as Henry Fielding, but not to many is it given to end it as nobly as he did. He expended his last energies in works of philanthropy and benevolence; . . . and he went to a foreign grave with the courage of a hero and the dignity of a philosopher."⁸³ Dobson admits too readily, no doubt, the wildness of the novelist in his younger days—surely, in this matter, Professor Cross's recent biography is the safer guide; but the attention which he thus drew to a work everyone must know if he would understand the author aright was a noteworthy item in establishing a new Fielding in place of the old. When Stevenson died (in 1894), Mr. Quiller-Couch very happily pointed out the parallel between the "cheerful stoicism" of the modern romancer and that of his famous predecessor.⁸⁴ It is an interesting fact that, during the Great War, the *London Times*, as Mr. de Castro observes, considered the *Voyage* of "sufficient interest to include passages from it among the broadsheets supplied to the English army in the trenches."⁸⁵ Had the earlier writers on Fielding and his works studied his last *Journal* with even ordinary care the caricature of him as a rollicking wastrel or a brutal picaresquer could never have enjoyed so great a vogue.

During the last decade of the century, along with the saner appreciation of Fielding's own tenderness and wholesomeness, came a more cordial and rational view of the tenderness and

⁸³ "Introduction" to the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, London, 1892, p. xxi.

⁸⁴ *Adventures in Criticism*, London, 1896, p. 179.

⁸⁵ *Notes and Queries*, 12 S., II, August 5, 1916, p. 106.

wholesomeness of his women characters. Mr. Birrell, it is true, defending Richardson,⁸⁶ falls foul of Amelia and Sophia as "stage properties as old as the Plantagenets"; declares that their "characters" are "made to hinge solely upon their willingness . . . to turn a blind eye"; and pictures for us "the triumphant, orthodox Fielding, to whom man was a rollicking sinner, and woman a loving slave." But this hereditary view of Fielding's heroines was in the 'Nineties much less commonly entertained. It was Thackeray, of course, who made Amelia popular. Still, Thackeray's appreciation, eulogistic as it was, was somewhat over-sentimentalized, somewhat lacking in strength: there was always lurking in the background the idea that when Fielding created Amelia he was thinking of himself as the erring and penitent Booth; that in pleading for Booth, Amelia was pleading for Fielding the profligate; and that a woman who would excuse the delinquencies of such a reprehensible creature must be somewhat lacking in spirit. The real Amelia, however, as Clara Thomson⁸⁷ and others have pointed out, is a woman of strength rather than of weakness—not insipid, but instinct with womanly charm. As for Sophia, Thackeray's picture of her as a "fond, palpitating little creature"—an inheritance from Richardson—was exceedingly tenacious. Such a characterization was, of course, entirely misleading; but only within the last generation has the actual Sophia been restored. As a matter of fact, Fielding's heroines have many of the qualities of the "modern" woman, who, before Meredith, was (save in Shakespeare) the exception rather than the rule. Andrew Lang says of them: "The humour of Fielding and his tenderness make Amelia and Sophia far more sure of our hearts than, let us say, Rowena, or the Fair Maid of Perth. . . . For a . . . serious and life-long affection there are few heroines so satisfactory as Sophia Western and Amelia Booth. . . . Never before nor since did a man's ideal put on flesh and blood—out of poetry, that is,—

⁸⁶ *Res Judicatae*, pp. 18, 27.

⁸⁷ See Clara Thomson's "Note on Fielding's Amelia," in *The Westminster Review*, CLII, 579-588 (November, 1899).

and apart from the ladies of Shakespeare. Fielding's women have a manly honour, tolerance, greatness, in addition to their tenderness and kindness. Literature has not their peers, and life has never had many to compare with them. They are not 'superior' like Romola, nor flighty and destitute of taste like Maggie Tulliver; among Fielding's crowd of fribbles and sots and oafs they carry that pure moly of the Lady in 'Comus.'⁸⁸

Thus, in the closing years of the century, with a better understanding of Fielding's attainments as a scholar, of his tenderness as shown by the *Voyage to Lisbon*, of the charm and strength of his women characters, of the breadth and wholesomeness of his ethical purpose, of the heartening quality of his prose style, and of the nobility as an art form of the kind of realism in which he worked, the fame of the great novelist, released more and more from Victorian misrepresentation, shone with increased brightness. Even those who defended Richardson were compelled to admit the esteem in which Fielding was held by the majority of critics. G. B. Hill, the editor of Johnson, who (in 1891) quotes at length the praise, foreign and domestic, of Richardson's novels, concedes that Fielding has "ten readers" to Richardson's one.⁸⁹ And a year or so later, Augustine Birrell, in the midst of his defense of Richardson, exclaims, "No wonder *Tom Jones* is still running; where, I should like to know, is the man bold enough to stop him."⁹⁰ Looking back upon the period in question, Edmund Gosse writes, "The new curiosity about Fielding was appeased by successive editions of his 'Works,' that edited by Leslie Stephen (1882) in ten volumes, by Mr. Saintsbury (1893) in twelve, by myself (1899)⁹¹ in twelve, and by Henley (1903), also in twelve volumes. The released

⁸⁸ A. Lang's *Old Friends*, London, 1890, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Hill, G. B., *Writers and Readers*, New York and London, 1892, p. 91 (his lecture was given in 1891).

⁹⁰ *Res Judicatae*, p. 20. For a recent appreciation, see Mr. Birrell's *More Obiter Dicta*, New York, pp. 105-111.

⁹¹ Volume I is dated 1898.

popularity of Fielding was shown by the fact that these four extended and expensive editions were immediately bought up."⁹²

Of Stephen's edition we have spoken at some length; of the editions of Saintsbury, Gosse, and Henley—from which excerpts have already been given—some account is now in order. Saintsbury's edition in 1893—furnished with a general introduction on the author and several prefatory essays on his works—was particularly hearty in its praise of the great novels; and this critical apparatus, frequently reprinted in the popular "Temple Edition," has exerted, no doubt, considerable influence. Defying objectors, Saintsbury boldly proclaimed Fielding one of the four Atlantes of English verse and prose—the others being Shakespeare, Milton, and Swift—"Atlantes" in the sense that they either bore a whole world on their shoulders or looked down on a world. He had no hesitation in declaring Fielding the first to display the qualities of a perfect novelist as distinguished from those of a romancer: probable and interesting course of action, lively dialogue, appropriate use of description, and—last and chiefly—character absolutely lifelike. He admitted Fielding's lack of the "poet's thought," but defended him as a structural artist against those who either quarreled with his inter-chapters, exordiums, and insertions, or with what—in the days of "Russian Nihilists and French Naturalists"—some critics were pleased to call Fielding's "toylike world."⁹³ Bagehot, it will be remembered, characterized Fielding as a "reckless enjoyer," as had Taine also—a notion which had taken a strong hold upon the popular fancy. Perhaps the best thing that Saintsbury did was to point out the proper refutation of this fallacy. "There are two moods," he says, "in which the motto is *Carpe diem*; one a mood of simply childish hurry, the other where behind the enjoyment of the moment lurks . . . that vast ironic consciousness of the before and after, which I at least see everywhere in the back-

⁹² Gosse, Edmund, *Books on the Table*, New York, 1921, pp. 262, 263.

⁹³ Fielding's *Works*, London, 1893, I, xxvii.

ground of Fielding's work." This is not the Fielding portrayed by Leslie Stephen in 1882; in place of the "common-sense" moralist—that shrewd but unspiritualized advice-giver who is apt to become tiresome—we have here the Molière of England, who "looks down on his creations" with an "Olympian serenity of irony." In the editor's opinion, *Jonathan Wild*—which, he says, both Hazlitt and Thackeray "shied" at and which Scott did not understand—is the "greatest piece of pure irony in English out of Swift"; and the reason the book has never been a favorite is that very few people after all really understand or enjoy pure irony. Thus Saintsbury was the first of Fielding's editors to dwell at length on this prime essential of his genius. We cannot here record the detailed criticism in the introductions—the defense of the exordiums and initial essays, of the interpolated story, of the plot of *Tom Jones*, of the "audacity" and success of *Amelia* as an experiment in realism, and many other matters of importance and interest; but it may be said in general that this view of the novelist's accomplishment given to the public in 1893 was particularly sane and appreciative.

Surely in the 'Nineties the gust for Fielding was becoming very noticeable; five years after the Saintsbury edition, came the expensive and beautiful volumes issued by Constable in 1898. For this edition Edmund Gosse prepared an excellent introductory essay. To him, as to Saintsbury, it seemed, despite the good work that had been going on for a decade and a half, that Fielding's character was not yet seen in its true light. "In his own age," wrote Gosse, "although his books were read with pleasure, the character of Fielding was maligned and the trend of his genius miscomprehended. We are but now learning to put aside the picturesque vision of a flushed and convivial Fielding, hiccupping the hours away at East Stour, with his retinue of 'costly yellow liveries' about him. The careful Keightley was the first to point out that if there had been liveries at all, they would have been white and blue, not yellow. Then there is Horace Walpole's tale, at a time some sixteen years later, of the blindman's banquet and the bone of

ham. These wretched rags of gossip long coloured the world's whole conception of Henry Fielding, and they colour it still. Extravagance, reckless parade on the very verge of indigence, presumptuous family pride alternating with a squalid indifference to the decencies,—these are the qualities which the Bridget Allworthys of literature have always enjoyed attributing to the author of 'Tom Jones.' They have had their pleasure, but it is now time to say once for all that the evidence on which their tongues have worked is of the flimsiest and the least coherent."⁹⁴ The reason for "this prejudice which so long obscured the character of Fielding" is found by Gosse not where Scott found it or where Thackeray found it but "in the very essence of his attitude to life and literature. To say that Richardson envied and Walpole disliked him is merely to state facts; it remains to show why they did so, and why the polite world followed them. But between Fielding and all his contemporaries there rose a wall of imperfect sympathy. He was not as they were; his ideals were different; his aims contradicted theirs. To the comparatively wholesome and manly generation of the age of Anne, there had succeeded a race much reduced in its animal and mental vigour. It was the age of tears that had dawned with Fielding's childhood; it was the generation which meditated with Young and Blair among the tombs, that combined the lachrymose with the sentimental, that wrapped itself, sighing, in a genteel mantle of melancholy. To this age, Richardson, with unflinching tact, offered the long-drawn, elegant 'high-life' of 'Sir Charles Grandison.' But all this was diametrically opposed to the temper and tendency of Fielding; he chafed under it, and it rewarded him with ladylike disdain. To Fielding a new thing had been revealed."

To get the force of this excellent criticism, one should put it beside the passage from *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) in which Leslie Stephen declares that Field-

⁹⁴ Fielding's *Works*, Westminster and New York, 1898, I, xxxvii-xxxviii.

ing has given the very "form and pressure" of that unspiritualized age. Fielding was no mere photographer of an unlovely era; between him and his contemporaries, as Gosse has aptly said, "there rose a wall of imperfect sympathy." It is unfortunate that this acute observation was hidden away in the introduction to an expensive edition, for it is one of the most important *dicta* that have ever been pronounced upon the work of Henry Fielding. Gosse has not quite the same appreciation of Fielding's irony that Professor Saintsbury expressed in *his* introduction; as on a previous occasion, he finds this quality in *Jonathan Wild* somewhat "excessive and fatiguing." Nor has his esteem for *Amelia* perceptibly increased with the years. But these are minor details; of its author—"whose influence has been by far the widest and deepest" of all eighteenth-century novelists—he writes: "It is singularly fortunate for us . . . that the writer who first opened a path for the novel, and bade it flourish and spread amongst Englishmen, was so honest and so vigorous and so wholesome a human being as Henry Fielding."

Look where we may at the end of the century, the trend⁹⁵ of the new era is plainly to be observed. In many a "vignette," as well as in other publications, Austin Dobson (who appended additional information to the edition of 1889) referred to Fielding; and Professor Saintsbury was also indefatigable—while the books and periodicals of that day were sprinkled with casual references too numerous to particularize. Lionel Johnson, in his *Art of Thomas Hardy* (1892), makes too much of the "rough and ready adventures" in the novels; yet he acknowledges his delight in their "wit," their "wisdom," and their "tender thought."⁹⁶ And Thomas Hardy himself, four

⁹⁵ "Lewis Melville" asserted that the "more highly cultured (1899) regard" Thackeray "as an equal of Fielding" (*The Life of . . . Thackeray*, London, II, 239); and Professor Trent declared (1899) that *Tom Jones* was "probably the greatest English novel" (W. P. Trent, *Literature and Morals*, New York, p. 130).

⁹⁶ Johnson, L., *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, London, 1894, pp. 21, 23 (preface dated 1892).

years before, while praising the structural art of Richardson, admitted that *Clarissa* "and her companions" were "cold, even artificial," compared with "the figures animated by Fielding." *Tom Jones* he lists among those fictions—"remarkable" for their "fewness"—which "most nearly fulfill the conditions" of artistic building, and says that this novel "is usually pointed out as a near approach to perfection in this as in some other characteristics." Speaking for himself, he does "not perceive its great superiority in artistic form" over certain "novels of lower reputation"; but the best he can say of Richardson is that in his "artistic spirit"—as evidenced by the "structural parts of his work and the interaction of his personages"—lies "the author of *Clarissa*'s real if only claim to be placed on a level with Fielding."⁹⁷ Samuel Butler, though fatigued by Fielding's "episodes," declares that as literature the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Book of Job cannot "hold their own" against a masterpiece like *Tom Jones*, whose author, he thinks, would have been "delightful" to know.⁹⁸

After this fashion run the comments, which, notwithstanding discordant notes, were increasingly frequent and favorable. A retort to the charge of unspirituality may be found in the witty account of Fielding's status in 1898 which appeared in *The Academy* as a new "Journey to the Next World." Fielding comes up, leaning on the arm of Walter Scott and surveying "the orange groves" and the spirits who haunt them with a glance of "amiable" and "unsurpassable irony." From time to time, Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens bow to him as "their chief," and George Eliot also drops "a curtesy." In the course of the conversation Fielding hears a good deal of news: that more "new editions and more copies" of his works "are issued to-day" than in his "lifetime"; that one of his descend-

⁹⁷ Hardy, T., *Life and Art*, New York, 1925, pp. 69, 70, 71. For the original article ("The Profitable Reading of Fiction") see *The Forum*, New York, March, 1888.

⁹⁸ *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, edited by H. F. Jones, London, 1912, pp. 191 (1897), 202 (1883).

ants has gotten out an expurgated⁹⁹ *Tom Jones*; and that the "strong men" recognize his "strength" while the "second-raters" run him down—

"They hold that you never saw the spiritual¹⁰⁰ side," said I [the reviewer]. "There is no *Sturm und Drang* experience in your heroes, no struggles of the soul, no deep insight through the garmentage of life into what is essential and eternal."

"What the devil does this all mean?" cried Fielding in surprise. "I know that Minos has turned my old friend Square . . . back into the world, but he has picked up a new lingo if this be he under another shape."¹⁰¹

When Henley sat down to write for the edition of 1903 his "Essay on the Life, Genius and Achievement" of Henry Fielding the attitude of the critical world was obviously different from what it had been twenty years before when he reviewed Stephen's "Memoir" and Dobson's biography. During the two decades, as we have seen, a considerable body of excellent appreciation of Fielding had sprung up and flourished; and especially cordial had been the critics of the previous ten years. A greater friendliness toward realism, a better attitude toward the eighteenth century, a desire for a more "scientific" and "disinterested" criticism—all these conditions augured well for Fielding. On the other hand, the old Thackeray-Taine caricature was well-nigh ineradicable. Again and again in the midst of appreciations by the novelist's greatest admirers the traditional Fielding and the traditional *Tom Jones* would appear unpleasantly. Take, for instance, Andrew Lang. Here was a critic who had loved his Fielding from boyhood and who seized upon every opportunity to celebrate him in his critical essays. Yet in *Old Friends*, he pictures the married *Tom Jones*, who at the behest of his Sophia has gone forth to rescue Clarissa, as being made drunk by Lovelace and

⁹⁹ *Tom Jones* . . . by Henry Fielding, edited by his great-granddaughter, J. E. M. Fielding, London, 1896.

¹⁰⁰ According to W. C. Brownell, Fielding "lacks spirituality altogether."—*William M. Thackeray*, New York, 1900, p. 142.

¹⁰¹ *The Academy*, LIII, 127-128 (signed "P").

carried to Lady Bellaston by a couple of chairmen¹⁰²—notwithstanding the fact that Dobson had pointed out as early as 1883 that Tom Jones was neither a “gamester” nor a “sot.”¹⁰³ Then there was Frederic Harrison, whose just and eloquent tributes (several of which we have quoted) light up many a page of his in the 'Eighties and 'Nineties. Yet when Harrison declares that “so much is forgiven” Fielding for the “nobleness of his great heart”; that the “curse” of his age was upon him when he “deliberately” stooped “to the unclean”; that “grossness” has so “entered into the marrow” of *Tom Jones* that “a Bowdlerized version” of the book “would be hardly intelligible”¹⁰⁴—we must believe that the author of these expressions was experiencing some difficulty in freeing his mind from the traditional portrait then popular of that “son” of a “breezy, boisterous, disorderly” age.¹⁰⁵ This, at any rate, was the opinion of W. E. Henley, whose convictions regarding the greatness of Fielding had for twenty years past been growing more firm-set than ever.

To the task of depicting the true Fielding, Henley now manfully addressed himself. He passes in review the slander of the “frantic Scotchman,” Smollett; the “elderly-maiden-lady ruffianism” of Richardson; the “contemptuous” allusions of Fielding’s titled cousin; the libels of Horace Walpole; the unfortunate stories of Arthur Murphy; the prejudice of Scott, who “prefers his countryman above the ‘Englisher’”; the “absurd” “definition” of Taine; the imperfect sympathy of Leslie Stephen, who doesn’t fully understand this “immitigable Ironist”; and the somewhat “Middle-Victorian” attitude of Austin Dobson, who is “rather more apologetical than he needs to be.” But the writer upon whose “distorted and obscured” view he spends the most time is Thackeray, who—despite his incomparable “eulogy” of Fielding the Writer—either “wil-

¹⁰² *Old Friends*, London, 1890, pp. 90-96.

¹⁰³ *Fielding*, New York, 1883, p. 124.

¹⁰⁴ Harrison’s *Choice of Books*, London, 1886, p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison’s *Studies in Early Victorian Literature*, sixth impression, London, 1910, pp. 37, 39 (1894-1895).

fully or stupidly, misunderstood and mis-stated" Fielding the Man. At the end of his brilliant essay, Henley placed over against Taine's "good buffalo," his own "definition of Fielding"—in a passage of great eloquence—which may be regarded as the logical outcome and perfect blossoming of the period since Dobson:

"Here is a man brave, generous, kind to the *n*th degree; a man with a great hatred of meanness and hypocrisy, and a strong regard for all forms of *virtus*, whether natural and impulsive or an effect of culture and reflection; an impassioned lover, a devout husband, a most cordial and careful father; so staunch a friend that his books are so many proofs of his capacity for friendship; of so sound a heart, of so vigorous a temperament, of so clear-eyed and serene a spirit, that years and calamities and disease do not exist for him, and he takes his leave of the World in one of the most valiant and most genial little books that ever was penned; distinguished among talkers by a delightful gaiety, a fine and gracious understanding, an inalienable dignity; withal of an intelligence at once so vigilant and so penetrating, at once so observant and so laborious and exacting, that, without hurry as without noise, patient ever and ever diligent, a master of life, a master of character, a master of style, he achieved for us the four great books we have, and, in achieving them, did so nobly by his nation and his mother tongue that he that would praise our splendid, all-comprehending speech aright has said the best he can of it when he says that it is the speech of Shakespeare and Fielding."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Fielding's *Works*, edited by Henley, XVI, v-viii, xxxviii-xli.

CHAPTER XVII

The New Era

PART II

Since Henley's "Essay"

1903-1925

HENLEY'S tribute to Fielding, written when he himself was in the shadow of death, is not only most eloquent but most intuitively just. It is not at all surprising that the intrepid author of "Invictus" should feel an enthusiasm amounting to kinship for that valiant spirit whose great and radiant novels were indeed without exception produced in seasons of distress. But the glowing excerpt just transcribed gives an incorrect idea of that part of the "Essay" which deals with Fielding's life. Again—this time in an utterly new way—the writer of the "four great books" was decidedly unfortunate in his eulogist; for Henley, who neither made nor pretended to make any biographical investigations, adopted a plan and attitude as damaging to Fielding as it was original. In short, he accepted as true some of the worst slanders the novelist's enemies had ever invented and then defied his twentieth-century readers to disprove either Fielding's greatness as an author or his gentlemanliness as a man. Certainly this was a queer proceeding, but the reason for it is clear: seeing a good opportunity of having another fling at the Victorian prudishness which he so abhorred, Henley—innocently enough—turned Fielding as much to account for *his* purposes—though with different and less harmful consequences—as had his predecessors Murphy, Thackeray, and Taine. No doubt it tickled him immensely to visualize the squirm with which his horrified audience would read such brave statements as that "drunk or sober, Bellastonized or only 'on' with this lady or that, the man was a serious artist"; that "the Matthews and Bellaston episodes" not only occurred in Fielding's life but

that they were "deemed in no sort reprehensible"; nay, even that "the outcry against Mr. Jones's acceptance of money from Lady Bellaston . . . is largely" mere "Puritan hysteria." Certainly nothing could be better calculated to draw the ire of the exponents of what the rabid Henley calls "Purity and Art and Victorian-England." Not among the least of Fielding's misfortunes was the fact that this prominent man of letters, who so admirably appreciated his accomplishment and whose ringing eloquence drowned out the statements of more careful investigators, should choose this "Essay" in particular in which to display certain pet perversities. It is an odd proceeding to put Thackeray and Taine on their "marrow-bones" for their portrait of a flushed and convivial scapegrace and then gratuitously refer to Fielding's first wife, the beautiful and charming Charlotte Cradock, as the woman whom the novelist had "spree'd with; starved with; betrayed (it may be; I know not); and seen die." This "achievement in portraiture," to use Henley's own characterization of Thackeray's lecture, is "delightful as literature" but "wholly disloyal to letters." The critical part of the celebrated "Essay," then, marked an epoch in Fielding's fame; it put the stamp of its author's authority upon an admirable general estimate of Fielding's genius, and it severely arraigned his predecessors for their delinquencies. The biographical part, on the other hand,—in consequence of Henley's irreconcilable statements,—was decidedly injurious; but it is fair to say that greater damage would have resulted had it not been for the bizarre and swashbuckling manner which the essayist at times assumed.

To go into detail regarding the reception of Henley's "Essay" is unnecessary; the following account in *The Nation* sufficiently indicates the distance which criticism had travelled during the twenty years since Dobson. Fielding, we are told, treated his material "with the freedom and independence of a great humorist, and part of his reward has been identification with the baseness and corruption that he satirized." Along "with his fame, has been passed from generation to generation an impression that it rests on the description of his own vicious

life and the shameless exposure of his own black heart. . . . Through most of the nineteenth century, Henry Fielding (now absolutely identified with 'Tom Jones') existed under the grand tabu; and those who felt they must record a tribute to his literary achievement, let it be clearly understood that they knew well he was a shocking fellow and a sorry scoundrel. The eloquence of Thackeray's appreciation is marred by sighs and groans, and a generally missyish attitude towards a scandalous rake who had had the luck to write in a time when it was possible to depict himself. Twenty years ago, Mr. Austin Dobson gallantly broke a lance in defense of Fielding's character; but, as late as 1892, so tolerant and humorous a writer as Mr. Augustine Birrell declared that the 'very name Henry Fielding' rings in the true tradition of the eighteenth century—the tradition that the proper place for a novelist was 'either the pot or the sponging-house.' . . . Mr. Saintsbury and Mr. Leslie Stephen have striven to discredit the assumption that a man must be depraved because he wrote a good deal about rakes and blackguards of both sexes, and because he is known to have been pretty steadily in debt and sometimes drunk; and now . . . comes the late Mr. Henley, eager, injudicious, extravagant, in his wish to remove every stigma from the man whose work has such an important place in our literature. His partisanship hurts the case." As an instance of Henley's "extravagances" the writer of this article calls attention to the following bit of bravado: "I no more doubt that the Matthews and Bellaston episodes were profitable to Fielding: profitable and deemed in no sort reprehensible: than I doubt that their author wrote the *Journal of A Voyage to Lisbon*, every sentence in which is stamped the utterance of a humane, stately and honourable gentleman."¹ Had Henley lived, however, he would probably have been disappointed by the comparative serenity with which such statements as these were received. In most cases the reviewers knew what to expect from him—and, furthermore, they were now much better informed about Field-

¹ Henley edition, XVI, xvi.

ing than they had been in 1883. And so the writer of this article proceeds, without more ado, to say that "anyone who wishes sincerely to get away from the 'pot and sponging-house' tradition had better read the 'Journey' and the Preface to the 'Miscellanies' and perhaps one or two of the papers on public affairs which were written by Fielding in his quality of justice of the peace." Such a reading, he thinks, may bring "an opener mind to the 'four great books.'"²

An "opener mind" toward Fielding was now more common not only among men but among women. In 1904, the novelist Mrs. Craigie ("John Oliver Hobbes") made the statement in *The Academy* that "the epics of 'Tom Jones' and 'Amelia' ought to be given to every girl on her eighteenth birthday." "Many respectable tales are shocking," continues Mrs. Craigie, "because of their imbecility . . . their flimsy pictures of love and marriage enervate the mind"; whereas the novels of Fielding are the productions of "a moralist who, by his very moderation, produces a sounder impression, and preaches a better lesson than can ever be achieved by exaggerated statements on behalf of the angels, or against them."³ It is a significant fact that the periodical press was not, in general, scandalized by Mrs. Craigie's suggestion. "Certain it is," observed J. M. Bulloch in *The Lamp*, "that not for nearly a century could a reputable writer, especially a woman, have given such an admonition in the pages of a popular journal. Yet Mrs. Craigie's literary advice is timely, even logical, to-day; for we are emerging from a long night of prudery which drew sharp demarcations between the man and the woman."⁴ To the same effect, a writer in the *New York Times* declared: "If I had a daughter, I should certainly give her the works of Fielding. I should be sorry, of course, that she would have to make the

² *The Nation* (New York), LXXVII, 441-442 (December 3, 1903).

³ *The Academy*, LXVII, 51. Reprinted in *Letters from a Silent Study*, London, 1904, p. 229.

⁴ *The Lamp*, XXIX, 195-198 (October, 1904). J. K. Jerome also advises the reading of *Tom Jones*; see an interesting passage in *They and I*, London, 1909, pp. 262-263.

acquaintance of many severe facts with which Fielding deals, but she would have to learn these things at one time or another, and I do not think she could learn them in a better way than by reading 'Amelia.' It is a true study of human nature on robust lines, and the moral Fielding draws is invariably sound and reasonable. Unreasonable novels do enormous harm."⁵ One can imagine how such a suggestion as Mrs. Craigie's would have been received in Thackeray's day!⁶ As we see from her correspondence, Mrs. Craigie was a sincere admirer of Fielding, whose "ideas about men and women" were not shocking but "sound"; who—though he wrote of "vulgar people"—was "*not* vulgar" himself (Thackeray to her mind was often "atrociously so"); and who spent his thousands of hours to some purpose in building and enriching a *chef d'œuvre* like *Tom Jones*—a book very different from modern novels which are turned out "every year or every six months." "God's quickest work," she observes, "was a woman, and all theologians are agreed that she was a failure."⁷

It was highly appropriate, as James Russell Lowell remarked in 1883, that the Taunton bust of Fielding should have come from the hands of a woman. And surely of recent years, as society has "emerged" from its "long night of prudery," Fielding's women champions have increased in number. Of Miss Clara Thomson,—Richardson's biographer,—who (in 1899) defended the character of Booth against Professor Saintsbury and that of Amelia against Mr. Gosse, mention has already been made; of Miss G. M. Godden's excellent biography (1910) of Fielding we have yet to speak. But without piling up instances we may call attention to the contrast between the attitude of Mrs. Oliphant in 1869 and that of Mrs.

⁵ The New York Times, September 3, 1904, p. 596.

⁶ The intrepid Mrs. Sarah Austin, however, said in a private letter (1853) that "a few broad scenes or hearty jokes *à la* Fielding were very harmless" compared with the more genteel writing of George Sand.—Oscar Wilde's *Works*, New York, 1909, XII, 63.

⁷ *The Life of John Oliver Hobbes*, London, 1911, pp. 286 (1905), 296 (1905), 120 (1897), 108 (1897).

Andrew Lang twenty years later. To Mrs. Oliphant, Fielding's ridicule of *Pamela* in *Joseph Andrews* was the product of a "malice and filthiness" happily "incomprehensible to ourselves";⁸ to Mrs. Lang, the "proper frame of mind in which to read" Richardson's first novel "is to consider it in the light of an historical joke." "No woman with any delicacy of feeling," she continues, "could have sat complacently at her own table, while her husband entertained his company with prolonged and minute accounts of his attempts on her virtue. Can you fancy Fielding composing such a scene, Fielding whom Richardson scouts as a profligate?"⁹ Incidentally, however, Mrs. Oliphant has given an interesting solution of the old Richardson-Fielding problem. Declaring the character of Clarissa to be "the most celestial thing, the highest imaginative effort of his generation,"¹⁰ she was so sensible of the growing unpopularity of her favorite even in 1869 that she wrote her publisher, "I suppose I ought to be ashamed to confess that . . . as a matter of taste I actually prefer Lovelace to Tom Jones!"¹¹ And here is her reason, as given in the "Historical Sketches" on which she was then at work. Lovelace, she says (with a dig at Thackeray), is "not in the smallest degree a milksop," but "like a true woman's hero, will not allow himself to be beat." Therefore she prefers him to Tom Jones, who, notwithstanding "his fundamental easy-minded uncleanness," would "have been harmless as a girl to Clarissa" and would have "kissed the hem of her garment." Truly there is no accounting for tastes! One has the uneasy suspicion that there may be a good deal of truth in the following generalization: "To women, vice of the Tom Jones development is abhorrent and incomprehensible; while vice like that of

⁸ *Blackwood's Magazine*, CV, 260, 261 ("Historical Sketches," No. X). For a different view, see Miss Repplier's *Varia*, 1897, p. 202.

⁹ Mrs. Andrew Lang's "Richardson," in *Letters on Literature*, London and New York, 1889, p. 165.

¹⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine*, CV, 276.

¹¹ Mrs. Oliphant's *Autobiography and Letters*, New York, 1899, p.

Lovelace, which sets all the powers to work—which is full of plot and contrivance, of insatiable love of approbation and necessity for conquest, of emotion and mental excitement, and remorse and passion—is something which they can understand and realize." It is proper to let Mrs. Craigie, speaking for the twentieth-century woman, have the last word. "Many would find" *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, she admits, "deficient in romance and fine sentiments,"¹² dull here and there, and prosaic from beginning to end. Nevertheless, carefully read, and taken to heart, they would save women from innumerable mistakes and tears. *Tom Jones* and *Billy Booth* are not heroes, not philosophers, not men of intellectual tastes or intellectual professions, but they are men; they spring from a sound stock," and "they bear no sort of resemblance to the ultravirile bully, of costume plays and fiction."

That the high estimation in which Mrs. Craigie held the novels of Fielding was indicative of the general attitude in the literary world during the first decade of the century is amply shown by the eulogistic notices which appeared in books and periodicals at the time of the Fielding bi-centenary in 1907. In England, long before the author's birthday (April 22), preparations were being made for the celebration: during the month of November, 1906, we read in the *New York Times* that the "preliminaries" for a "big public dinner" are "under way" and that Sir A. C. Doyle "will preside";¹³ later we hear of the "new light opera based on 'Tom Jones'"¹⁴ which will be produced; and, later still, of a memorial edition of Fielding to be issued during the year. As it turned out, Conan Doyle, who afterwards made in one¹⁵ of his books

¹² Louisa M. Alcott, who thought *Charles Auchester* "charming," found *Amelia* "coarse and queer" (June, 1861).—*Louisa May Alcott*, edited by Cheney, Boston, 1923, p. 128.

¹³ The *New York Times*, *Saturday Review*, November 27, 1906, p. 759.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, January 5, 1907, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Through the Magic Door*, New York, 1909, pp. 144-145.

some rather uncomplimentary remarks about the novelist, is reported to have said in his capacity as toastmaster that Fielding, instead of being the "Father of the English Novel" was "more like the wicked uncle who stole the baby." Still, though "hardly as many" "literary people" were present at the dinner "as one would have expected,"¹⁶ the estimates of Fielding which ran the rounds of the periodicals were particularly high. If the shade of Richardson—as Traill would have it—was jealous of his rival at the unveiling of Fielding's bust in 1883, he had much more cause to be envious in 1907; for the magazines were practically unanimous in awarding the palm to the author of *Tom Jones*. According to *The Bookman* the relative proportion of the readers of Fielding and Richardson is as one thousand to one.¹⁷ *The Academy* (April 20, 1907) warmly praises Fielding for endeavoring to correct the "unreal emotionalism" and "boudoir sensibilities" of the author of *Pamela*.¹⁸ *The Saturday Review* (April 20, 1907) declares that the complete shift that has come about in the relative positions of Fielding and Richardson is "a very shrewd censure on the contemporaries" of the two novelists, "who thought of the one as a rake and of the other as a paragon of morality."¹⁹ Lastly, Professor Saintsbury in the (London) *Bookman* for April does battle with Fielding's assailants on both sides of the water from Richardson's day to the year 1907. Fielding, he says, "is much too moral for most Frenchmen—shockingly immoral to some Englishmen. To critics of the older generations he seemed to have too little 'sensibility,' civility, confinement of his subjects to persons of quality and *ton*. For critics of the youngest generation he is too natural and straightforward—not 'internal' enough . . . or rather not loquacious enough about his internalities. For that anyone really ac-

¹⁶ *The New York Times*, *Saturday Review*, May 11, 1907, p. 305.

¹⁷ *The Bookman* (New York), XXV, 120.

¹⁸ *The Academy*, LXXII, 389.

¹⁹ *The Saturday Review*, CIII, 489. See, also, W. Carew Hazlitt, *Some Prose Writings*, London, 1906, pp. 168-169.

quainted with the profounder depths of human life can think Fielding shallow is an impossibility."²⁰

Reminiscences of Thackeray, in the various articles, were, of course, not infrequent. Mr. H. C. Minchin, commenting in the *Fortnightly* upon that lack of delicacy which, to his mind, prevented Fielding from seeing life "whole," sustains his *dictum* by saying that Thackeray in the *Humourists* "admits, with decent reluctance, that the cloth might have been cleaner"; and concerning the Lady Bellaston incident he agrees with Colonel Newcome in asking how "any self-respecting reader" can "tolerate one 'who sold himself.'"²¹ Still, on the whole, the drift toward a more reasonable view of Fielding was, despite all inconsistencies, plainly noticeable. Mr. J. H. Lobban, for example, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, repudiates Thackeray's portrait as a "caricature"; "Fielding," he says, "was no battered rake, but a hard-working man of letters." It is true that Lobban is too much inclined to identify Captain Booth with the man who created that character; but his article is significant as a reflection of the ideas of the novelist which were now gaining a more general acceptance. "No conception of Fielding's personality is complete," he declares, "that fails to do justice to his scholarship and his punctilious discharge of duty." He insists upon the author's seriousness of purpose, the great novels being unquestionably intended as a "criticism of life"; he regards *Jonathan Wild* as an "eagle-flight of irony" never surpassed; while the *Voyage to Lisbon*, the "signal neglect" of which has been one of the main reasons for the misinterpretation of the writer's genius, holds "the secret of the genesis and development" of his "artistic achievement." Lobban's enjoyment of Fielding's style has, if anything, increased during the decade; to him it is "a model of ease and strength, absolutely free from every kind of inkhorn affectation and mannerism," for the "mock-heroics are only a scholar's jest." "It may be," he remarks, that Fielding really did "put all the wit and humour he was master of into the

²⁰ *The Bookman* (London), XXXII, 8.

²¹ *The Fortnightly Review*, LXXXI (N. S.), 626, 630.

book, but the impression it leaves is of an immense reserve"; and he insists that no one "who cannot relish the inimitable Prefaces has any right to sit down to the banquet that follows."²²

The most "striking quality" of Fielding brought out by the bicentenary essays, according to *The Literary Digest*, was his "modernity"²³—a topic on which Mr. C. H. Gaines wrote an excellent article in *Harper's Weekly* for April 20, 1907. "No writer of the past two centuries," says Mr. Gaines, "has come nearer to the modern ideal of truth and vitality which, in spite of much that is fanciful and overrefined in our fiction, does predominate in our minds, than the grand common ancestor of them all, Henry Fielding." In Mr. Gaines's opinion, it is the distinguishing mark of Fielding's greatness, that, standing as he does as the first of the English novelists, he is still the one, in spite of all fluctuations in taste, to whom we have "swung round" for our best ideals of what a good novel should be. "It makes us open our eyes," he continues, "to find that this originator of the modern novel (for this title, by general consent, belongs not to Defoe or Richardson, but to Fielding) deliberately set himself a difficult standard—very like our own, and very different from that of his predecessors—and lived up to it more honestly than we live up to ours. . . . We find in him, then, the most hearty and humane of realists; but his realism is not of that decadent kind which runs to an accumulation of meaningless detail and incident. In his comments and asides to the reader he is particularly clear upon the duty of presenting only what is significant. . . . But while Fielding possessed all the essentials of his art as it is practiced to-day, there is in him a nascent vigor which no modern author can quite equal. . . . He seems always to refuse with scorn the little arts of mystification which are at present so much in use."²⁴ Thus, with the periodical writers, the Fielding of the Bi-centenary, though still inadequate, was

²² *Blackwood's Magazine*, CLXXXI, 550-565 (April, 1907).

²³ *The Literary Digest*, XXXIV, 721 (May 4, 1907).

²⁴ *Harper's Weekly*, LI, 578.

a very different being—not only relatively but absolutely—from the Fielding of 1883, whose bust was unveiled at Taunton.

These saner views of the novelist were not confined to the efforts of professional paragraphers who were obliged, to fill space concerning a bicentennial celebration. A glance at the text-books published during this period is sufficient to discover traces—sometimes faint but often clearly marked—of the new estimate of the author which was taking the place of the old. To Professor Arlo Bates there was "little really great"²⁵ in the eighteenth century "save the works of Fielding." Professor C. S. Baldwin declares that the novelist who brought fiction to its "modern form is Fielding," in whose hands it "became, and at its best has ever since remained, a web of life."²⁶ Professor Brander Matthews calls *Tom Jones*—"eternal in its verity"—"one of the greatest" novels in our language, and "perhaps one of the greatest in the modern literature of any country."²⁷ G. E. Woodberry, reprinting his early review, still applauds Lowell for saying in the Taunton address that "the second of the seven deadly sins is not less dangerous when she talks mysticism, and ogles us through the gaps of a fan painted with the story of the virgin martyr," and classes Fielding with Scott and Hugo as the "greatest of our northern Novelists."²⁸ And Professor Gummere, scorning qualifying phrases, asserts that of all "our novelists" Fielding was the "greatest."²⁹ Imagine the surprise of the Rev. Hugh Blair, whose statement in 1783 that Richardson was the "most moral" of our fiction-writers had such longevity—nay, imagine the wonderment of that father of histories of English

²⁵ *Talks on the Study of Literature*, Boston and New York, 1900, p. 65.

²⁶ *Composition: Oral and Written*, New York, 1909, p. 351.

²⁷ *The Historical Novel*, New York, 1901, p. 57.

²⁸ *Literary Memoirs of the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 1921, p. 318; *Literary Essays*, New York, 1920, p. 143.

²⁹ Hinchman, W. S., and Gummere, F. B., *Lives of Great English Writers*, Boston and New York, 1908, p. iv.

literature, the moral Chambers, who held sway among the Mid-Victorians, could he peruse the following paragraph in the *History of English Literature* by W. R. Nicoll and Thomas Seacombe (editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*) published in 1906-1907. It used to be "commonly assumed," runs the account, that "the tendency of Richardson was Sunday and edifying, while that of Fielding was decidedly shady. We should hardly take this view now. The copy-book morality of Richardson, with its perpetual insistence upon" the "cash value" of chastity and the "mordant analysis to which this theme is subjected—this it is at the present day which is in danger of being regarded as prudish."¹⁰ The "virtue of Fielding, with its broad tolerance" is "seen to be fundamentally a much nobler and more generous creed, not concentrated upon one or two departments of human conduct, but distributed with philosophic breadth and insight over the whole." Once the moral barrier was cleared the rest of the way was easy; accordingly we read—"Fielding" combined "breadth and keenness, classical culture, and a delicate Gallic irony to an extent rare among English writers." There was "no poetry" in him; but "there was practically every other ingredient of a great prose writer—taste, culture, order, vivacity, humour, and irony delicately blended, and, above all, a penetrating common-sense. Of the race of Cervantes and Molière, he is unquestionably the great man of letters of the 'forties and 'fifties."

Also in text-books on the art of fiction, more numerous since the new century began, Fielding has usually been spoken of—for Professor Raleigh and Professor Cross had set excellent examples in the 'Nineties—with a considerable degree of enthusiasm. One of the most notable attacks upon his novels was

¹⁰ Nicoll and Seacombe, *A History of English Literature*, New York, 1907, III. 632-633. The London edition was in 1906. On reading *Clara*, "Mark Rutherford" wrote (1833): "This incessant circling and hovering round one idea or rather one image makes the story more immoral by far than anything Fielding ever wrote."—*Letters to Three Friends*, Oxford, 1924, p. 95.

made by C. F. Horne in 1908, and even he characterized their author as "the great conscious artist who first examined the technique of the new art." Of late years the charge has been made rather frequently that the plot of *Tom Jones* is artificial; such is the view of Professor Horne, to whom the *architektonike* that won the praise of Coleridge is only a trickster's perfection. *Joseph Andrews*, to his mind, is not so "great or so enthralling" a book as *Pamela*; while *Clarissa* rises immeasurably above *Tom Jones* as one of the few examples of the highest possible type of novel—the "inevitable."⁸¹ On this point, however, most writers—and readers—it would seem, are less often in accord with Professor Horne than with Professor Saintsbury, who, in *The English Novel* (1913), awards, as usual, the highest honors to Fielding, and who takes particular pains to defend the naturalness of his art. "During the curious phase of literary opinion which the last twenty years or so have seen," writes Saintsbury, "it has apparently been discovered by some people" that Fielding's "scheme of human thought and feeling is too simple—'toylike' I think they call it—in comparison with that, say, of Count Tolstoi." In his opinion this "unfavourable comparison is mainly a revival of Johnson's mistake as to Fielding and Richardson"; but it is, too, "something more—for it comes also from a failure to estimate aright" Fielding's initial chapters. "These passages," he says, "do not perhaps exhibit the by-work and the process in the conspicuous skeleton-clock fashion which their critics admire and desire, but they contain an amount of acute and profound exploration of human nature which it would be difficult to match and impossible to surpass elsewhere: while the results of Fielding's working, of his 'toylike' scheme, are remarkable toys indeed." In fact, "one is sometimes constrained to think that it is perhaps not much more difficult to make than to recognise a thoroughly live character."⁸² The status (in

⁸¹ Horne, C. F., *The Technique of the Novel*, New York [1908], pp. 15, 122, 120, 273.

⁸² Saintsbury, G., *The English Novel*, London and New York, 1913, p. 108.

1911) of Fielding as an artist is thus described by Harold Williams, in his *Two Centuries of the English Novel*. Since only occasional critics are "yet to be found who suggest for Richardson" a "higher place as a novelist" than for Fielding, writes Mr. Williams, it is unnecessary to "offer reasons" for an opposite opinion so universally held. *Clarissa*, the "first great novel," is "now" read only by the "elect few"; while *Tom Jones* can "probably" claim "a larger and more imposing consensus of opinion that it is the greatest novel ever written than any other piece of prose-fiction penned by the hand of man." Calling attention to the fact that Fielding has "certainly suffered in the general and uncritical estimation from a curious and unreasoning dogmatic belief that he is low, coarse, immoral, and subversive of decent feeling," Mr. Williams asserts that there "are still people to be found who learn with genuine surprise that his is one of the greatest names in English literature"; for, "since his writing days down to the present," he "has been called before the bar, and accused or defended upon a narrow issue which obscures the large-minded and generous comprehensiveness of his personal sympathies and artistic ideals." Fielding, however, "stands beyond the range of petty indictments or explanations: the whole motive of the man is too wide to be touched by them. The full stream of life flows through the pages of his novels; the generosity and sincerity of his laughter and tears clear the mind and purify the heart. It is good to laugh, and to laugh with a blessed sense that life is laughable without being contemptible, that men are often foolish but scarcely ever utterly knavish."³³ In his *Advance of the English Novel* (1916), Professor Phelps also dwells upon Fielding as a "great humourist"—one of "the greatest in English literature"—since his "view of the world had the immense tolerance and profound sympathy of the true humourist, along with keenness of observation whetted by satire." In his opinion, only the absence of "mystery" from

³³ Williams, Harold, *Two Centuries of the English Novel*, London, 1911, pp. 53, 54, 50, 55.

Tom Jones keeps "that novel from being the best" in "the English language."³⁴

As we pass from the numerous articles and treatises on the novel to the *dicta* of fiction-writers themselves we find, as a rule, a recognition of Fielding's greatness and not rarely a sincere enthusiasm for his splendid achievement. To be sure, voices are occasionally raised against him—George Moore's, for example, when he brands Fielding as conventional,³⁵ though eventually he ranks him—below Balzac—with Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot;³⁶ and May Sinclair's when she asserts that the "passion between man and woman" which Fielding dealt with was "solely" "animal passion"³⁷—a rather exaggerated statement. And the other day W. L. George made the remark that "there is not complete sincerity in 'Tom Jones' . . . even as the word sincerity is understood in England,"³⁸ though in another place he says, "If the future is to give us a Balzac or a Fielding, he will not write like a Balzac or a Fielding"—thus implying the great excellence of the author of *Tom Jones*.³⁹ Again, Eden Phillpotts believes that his contemporaries (1915) have written "some of the best novels in our tongue"; yet in saying this he does not intend "to disparage the pioneer masters" such as Fielding, who "had a different field to play upon."⁴⁰ Galsworthy, also, asserting that

³⁴ Phelps, W. L., *The Advance of the English Novel*, New York, 1916, pp. 60, 207.

³⁵ George Moore's "Avowals," in *Lippincott's Magazine*, LXXII, 345, 346, 347 (September, 1903). An extreme case of imperfect sympathy is that of Mr. James Stephens, to whom the "worldly-wise chatter" of that "glorified mediocrity" Fielding is positively "loathsome."—"An Essay in Cubes," in *The English Review*, XVII, 84 (April, 1914).

³⁶ George Moore's *Impressions and Opinions*, London, 1913, pp. 18, 42.

³⁷ May Sinclair's *The Three Brontës*, Boston and New York, 1912, p. 137.

³⁸ W. L. George's "Sincerity and Literature," in *A Modern Book of Criticism*, edited by Ludwig Lewisohn, New York, 1919, p. 130.

³⁹ W. L. George's *Literary Chapters*, Boston, 1918, p. 49.

⁴⁰ Eden Phillpotts in the *New York Times*, August 22, 1915.

authors should not be in bondage to the past, speaks of Fielding as the representative of his era, and mentions in the same breath, "Tom Jones, Faust, Don Juan."⁴¹

And so we might go on almost indefinitely; the fact to be observed is that even the more censorious writers usually end by conceding Fielding's greatness. In the symposium⁴² on the "Six Best Novels" from which Mr. Phillpotts's observation is quoted, *Tom Jones* finds place in a number of the lists—notably in those of W. J. Locke, W. L. George, and St. John Ervine. To Mr. Ervine, indeed, Fielding's masterpiece—full of "that peculiar heartiness which is essentially English" and "natural as blackberries on an English hedge"—is "immeasurably the best novel in our tongue." James Lane Allen has not read the book but feels it necessary to say so. Elsewhere we learn that Owen Wister⁴³ in his boyhood drank deep at Fielding's spring, as did Bret Harte⁴⁴ before him; nor was the author of *Tom Jones* unknown to that epic novelist Frank Norris, who, early in his brief career, came under the spell of Sophia Western. Sophia, and Amelia also, were characterized by Maurice Hewlett as "two charming women." He suspected that the "endings" of the novels—in which these delightful heroines married "a couple of scamps"—were deliberately "cynical"; yet he classed *Tom Jones* with *David Copperfield* and *Vanity Fair* as a book which contains "sufficient of the world to create in us a strong illusion" of life as a "whole."⁴⁵ Gilbert Cannan pays his respects to the "happy, leisurely technique of Fielding," though he thinks it "unsuited to the purposes of the modern novel."⁴⁶

More agreeable is the task of recording the less alloyed⁴⁷

⁴¹ John Galsworthy's *Inn of Tranquillity*, New York, 1912, pp. 210, 266.

⁴² *The Times* (New York), August 22, 29, 1915.

⁴³ *The Bookman* (New York), 1908, XXVII, 464.

⁴⁴ Erskine, J., *Leading American Novelists*, New York, 1910, p. 327.

⁴⁵ *Last Essays*, New York, 1924, pp. 129, 63.

⁴⁶ Quoted by J. W. Cunliffe, *English Literature during the Last Half Century*, New York, 1919, p. 286.

⁴⁷ Mr. S. M. Crothers, a warm admirer of Fielding, refers his

praise of Shaw, Wells, Bennett, and Chesterton. As might have been foretold, the most startling pronouncement was made by G. B. Shaw, when he declared that the author of *Tom Jones* was "the greatest" English dramatist except Shakespeare "between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century." Mr. Shaw's appreciation of Fielding as a novelist is implied in his further statement that because that writer was, by the Licensing Act, "driven out of the trade of Molière and Aristophanes" and into "that of Cervantes," the "English novel has been one of the glories of literature, whilst the English drama has been its disgrace."⁴⁸ Another striking assertion was made by Arnold Bennett in 1909. "Between Fielding and Meredith," he writes, "no entirely honest novel was written by anybody in England. The fear of the public, the lust of popularity, feminine prudery, sentimentalism, Victorian niceness,—one or other of these things prevented honesty. In 'Richard Feverel,' what a loosening of the bonds! What a renaissance. Nobody since Fielding would have ventured to write the Star and Garter chapter in 'Richard Feverel.' It was the announcer of a sort of dawn."⁴⁹ It is true that at this time Mr. Bennett speaks of *Clarissa* as the "greatest realistic novel in the world"; but to his mind, for all that, the supreme master of English fiction is Henry Fielding. Here is his estimate, which, though touched perhaps by Stephen's "common-sense" *dictum*, is yet not tainted by it. "Fielding lives unequalled among English novelists because the broad nobility of his mind is unequalled. He is read with unreserved enthusiasm because the reader feels himself at each paragraph to be in close contact with a glorious personality. And no advance in

"Gentle Reader" more than once to the pages of *Tom Jones*; and Mr. Clement Shorter declares that Fielding's masterpiece is the "greatest" of all novels.—*Immortal Memories*, New York and London, 1907, p. 267 note.

⁴⁸ G. B. Shaw's *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant*, London, 1906, I, xiii, xiv.

⁴⁹ Bennett, Arnold, *Books and Persons*, London, 1917, p. 135 ("Meredith," May 27, 1909).

technique among later novelists can possibly imperil his position. He will take second place when a more noble mind, a more superb common sense, happens to wield the narrative pen, and not before."⁵⁰ More moderate is H. G. Wells, who says of his fellow craftsman, Howells, "He stands in my mind with Dickens and Fielding, one of the novelists who have always been there from the beginning."⁵¹ And G. K. Chesterton pays a similar compliment to Mr. Wells: "He walked on a round slippery world," declares that lover of antitheses, "as boldly as Ulysses or Tom Jones . . . on a flat one."⁵² Chesterton's own view of Fielding is given more at length in "Tom Jones and Morality," which was called forth at the time of the Bi-centenary by "the number" of articles in which there was "a curious tone of apologising for the man." "What on earth," he exclaims, "does all this mean?" "The truth is," he says, that we "have grown to associate morality in a book with a kind of optimism and prettiness; according to us, a moral book is a book about moral people." "And if goodness only exists in certain human minds, a man wishing to praise goodness will naturally exaggerate the amount of it that there is in human minds or the number of human minds in which it is supreme. Every confession that man is vicious is a confession that virtue is visionary." The "old idea," as he rightly points out, "was almost exactly the opposite"; Fielding "did not feel, as a melancholy modern would have done, that every sin of Tom Jones was in some way" destroying the "fiction of morality." In short, "what modern people call the foulness and freedom of Fielding is generally the severity and moral stringency of Fielding."⁵³

It is with the students of literature, however, rather than with recent novelists, that Fielding's greatness has usually been

⁵⁰ Bennett, Arnold, *The Author's Craft*, New York, 1914, p. 46.

⁵¹ As quoted in *Current Literature*, April, 1912, p. 462.

⁵² Chesterton, G. K., *The Victorian Age in Literature*, New York, 1913, p. 238.

⁵³ "Tom Jones and Morality," in *All Things Considered*, third ed., London, 1908, pp. 261-266.

most clearly perceived. Smaller and lighter models of fiction than those of the eighteenth century have so long been in vogue that most writers now get their Fielding indirectly and often unsuspectingly. On the other hand, scholarly investigators, acquainted with the entire field, marvel at the comprehensiveness and excellence of the Four Great Books both in theory and in practice. During the Victorian Age the most distinguished praise of Fielding came, on the whole, from the novelists—Bulwer, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith; during the past generation it has come from the critics and scholars. And surely it was time for scholars to lend a hand. In consequence of that more careful investigation of the facts of Fielding's life first made popular by Dobson in 1883, the opinion has been growing continually stronger that the bibulous, sponging, repentant, Booth-like "creature" insisted on by the admiring but careless Thackeray has little foundation in truth. Moreover, ever since Dobson set the fashion, many valiant attempts have been made—as we have recorded them in these pages—to eradicate the injurious effects which such a view of Fielding's personality inevitably exerted upon the assessment of him as an artist. As Professor Saintsbury says, "The popular idea of him as a heedless slapdash genius has naturally brought with it the notion that his elaborate prefaces are merely 'his fun,'—that his reading was scanty and somewhat paraded; his critical disquisitions a humorous pretence; and his books in reality things written *currente calamo* to amuse himself and others and to obtain the much needed guinea."⁵⁴ Mere assertion—and there has been on the whole a great deal of excellent mere assertion, due to a laudable desire to get at a truer estimate of his genius—mere assertion is powerless to destroy permanently such mistakes as have just been listed. All the talking in the world could never be so effectual in combating Thackeray's sneer about Fielding's "two-penny" learning as the discovery—by Austin Dobson—of the actual sale catalogue of the books which the novelist

⁵⁴ *Fielding*, London, 1909, pp. xxx-xxxi.

possessed. It is therefore necessary to take into consideration some of the findings that have resulted from the general study of Fielding's works, which, of late years, has been increasingly in vogue—though the following brief account, which makes no attempt at completeness, is all that the purpose of the present investigation will justify.

As long as he lived, Austin Dobson—in many articles and numerous books on the eighteenth century—continued to take an interest in all matters connected with Fielding, occasionally extending his researches and always bringing into his pages the casual reference. To the second edition of his *Fielding* in 1889 and to the "revised" edition of 1900 new materials were added; and, among other things, beside his article on the author's library in 1895,⁵⁵ he published in 1911 his "Fielding 'Find' "—that is, new letters written by the novelist at the end of his life. More important, however, is the fact that in his various books on the eighteenth century Dobson kept Fielding constantly before the public. It is impossible even to enumerate here the references in his *Horace Walpole* (1890); *William Hogarth* (1891); *Eighteenth Century Vignettes: First Series* (1892), *Second Series* (1894), *Third Series* (1896); *Samuel Richardson* (1902); *Side-Walk Studies* (1902); *De Libris* (1908); *At Prior Park* (1912); *Rosalba's Journal* (1915); and other books—or to do more than mention his articles on Fielding in *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature* (1902) and in *The Encyclopædia Britannica* (1910).

Meanwhile Fielding's excellent supporters, Andrew Lang and Edmund Gosse, continued to refer to him casually, and Professor Saintsbury kept up in various publications—several of which have been mentioned—an admirable cudgel-play with Fielding's detractors, particularly in his *Masters of Literature* "Fielding" (1909) and his *English Novel* (1913). In 1907 Mr. F. S. Dickson, as we have observed, reprinted Keightley's articles as a separate volume, adding an introduction; and in 1913 contributed to *The North American Review* that vigor-

⁵⁵ *Bibliographica*, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 163-173.

ous and definitive article on "Thackeray and Fielding" from which we have previously quoted, and which should have effectually discredited the caricature of Fielding as presented in the *English Humourists*. Mr. Dickson's investigations regarding the chorography and chronology⁵⁶ of *Tom Jones* are of value in showing the pains which this supposed "slapdash" author took in carrying through the novel a place scheme and a time scheme. He was as careful, in fact, as if he had been writing a play. As Professor Cross remarks, it is unfortunate that "Mr. Dickson has been chary of publication"; for "no one who has not carefully inspected the Fielding Collection which he gave to the Library of Yale University can form any just idea of the scope of this scholar's work."⁵⁷

"Like Cervantes, like Shakspeare," Henley had said in 1882, Fielding "is a writer to be studied"; and this prophecy of his was now, in the twentieth century, becoming fulfilled. When, in the 'Sixties, a contributor to *The Cornhill Magazine*⁵⁸—presumably James Hannay, who prepared Thackeray's *English Humourists* for the press—ran across the Fielding entry in the Album of Leyden University, the only comment he had to make upon it was that the "Casteel van Antwerpen," where the young man was staying at the time of registration, must have been noted for the excellence of its liquor. A generation later the same entry became the theme of two magazine articles;⁵⁹ for the circumstance that Fielding was a "student of letters" rather than of "law" was another important item to be set down against Thackeray's sneer at the "two-

⁵⁶ Dickson, F. S., "The Chronology of 'Tom Jones,'" in Series III of *The Library*, VIII, 218-224 (July, 1917); "Errors and Omissions in 'Tom Jones,'" in *The Library*, IX, 18-26 (January, 1918); unpublished MSS. referred to in Cross's *Fielding*, II, 185; and an unpublished "Index to 'Tom Jones'" in the Yale Library.

⁵⁷ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 248-249.

⁵⁸ "A Scotchman in Holland," in *The Cornhill Magazine*, VIII, 553 (November, 1863). Dobson attributes the article to Hannay.

⁵⁹ A. E. H. Swaen, in *Modern Language Review*, July, 1906, 327, 328; and A. Dobson's "Fresh Facts about Fielding," in *Macmillan's Magazine*, XCV, 417-422 (April, 1907).

penny learning." As a result of turning up several new Fielding documents, Miss G. M. Godden brought out in 1910 her *Henry Fielding: a Memoir, including Newly Discovered Letters and Records*.⁶⁰ As has been observed, it is highly significant of the new spirit of the age that Fielding's life was now written by a woman and that this new biography was more commendatory than any previous one had been.

The most important papers that Miss Godden discovered were those connected with the old Chancery Case; for they (together with other documents brought to light by Mr. F. J. Pope) "necessitated the entire reconstruction of the story of Fielding's boyhood and youth."⁶¹ Another item of interest was the letter,⁶² dated July 9, 1739, in which Fielding asked John Nourse to "look for a House" for him at a rent of not more than £40 a year—an epistle which hardly jibes with the popular notion of an indigent Fielding who divided his time between garrets and sponging-houses. But these are matters that do not concern us here—except as they affect Miss Godden's general estimate, which may be given in the words of one of her friendly reviewers. "We heartily respond," runs the article in *The Athenaeum*, "to all her demands on us to recognise his [Fielding's] nobler qualities—his magnanimity, his generosity, his genuine sympathy with his poorer fellow-creatures, the intensity of his desire for their material amelioration, and the unflinching courage with which, apart from his gifts to literature, he expended his powers as a 'soldier of humanity.'"⁶³

For the novels themselves Miss Godden expresses the highest admiration, though as her book is confined to biography she can give them no extended treatment. It is noteworthy that the "charge of moral laxity" which "has been seriously brought

⁶⁰ Godden, G. M., *Henry Fielding*, London, 1910 (Preface dated October 26, 1909).

⁶¹ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 249. For Mr. Pope's discoveries see *The British Archivist*, January, 1914.

⁶² Miss Godden's *Henry Fielding*, pp. 94-95.

⁶³ *The Athenaeum*, January 15, 1910, p. 62.

against the pages of *Tom Jones*, and is perhaps not yet quite exploded," is to Fielding's first woman biographer "perhaps one of the most amazing pieces of irony in the whole history of English literature." Her refutation of the charge, in which she turns to excellent use the pronouncements of Coleridge and Scott, is well worth reading; but the theme on which she particularly shows her strength is that of Fielding's "realism." In 1908 Mr. H. M. Alden, of *Harper's Magazine*, had made the statement that Fielding's "realism" was "shallowly pessimistic";⁶⁴ and in 1909 a certain Emmanuel Green wrote an entire treatise—so ludicrously abusive that it might have been the work of one of the novelist's contemporaries—to prove that Fielding's books were as "low" as their author, who was, he said, a "most despicable character."⁶⁵ Such vagaries as these require no comment; but a fundamental and persistent error in many estimates of Fielding otherwise excellent has been the idea that his work is that of a photographer rather than that of a critic of life—an error for which professional historians (Lecky, for example) have been, as we have remarked, largely (and unconsciously) to blame. Fielding's novels do indeed give a picture of life in the mid-eighteenth century; but anyone who reads them aright must perceive that their author had constantly in mind the vision of a cleaner, kinder, happier state of society than the one he so effectively depicted. Therefore Miss Godden declares: "Superficial critics have called Fielding a realist because his figures are so full-blooded and alive that we feel we have met them but yesterday in the street; to eyes so short-sighted life itself must seem merely realistic. As none but an idealist could have conceived Parson Adams, so the creator of Sophia again announced himself an idealist in the Dedication of *Tom Jones*. Here, in the language of pure symbolism, he contends that the ideal virtues such as goodness and innocence, may most effectively be presented to men in a figure, for 'an Example is a Kind of Picture, in

⁶⁴ H. M. Alden's *Magazine Writing*, New York, 1908, p. 23. The volume was "made up largely of selections" from the "Editor's Study."

⁶⁵ Green, E., *Henry Fielding*, London, 1909.

which Virtue becomes as it were an Object of Sight, and strikes us with an Idea of that Loveliness, which *Plato* asserts there is in her naked Charms.'” Miss Godden calls attention to “the exquisite picture of virtue, the whole-hearted attack on vice, the genial humour, the sunny portraits of humanity,” and “the splendid cheerfulness” to be found in *Tom Jones*; and to that “final page” of the book, “than which no more charming representation of mutual affection, esteem, and well-doing can be imagined.”⁶⁶

Thus at the beginning of the second decade of the century Fielding and his works were more popular than ever with the literary investigator. A very important event in America was Mr. F. S. Dickson's gift of his Fielding Collection to Yale University. Setting aside the matter of first editions—and it was Mr. Dickson's aim to procure as far as possible everything published in Fielding's lifetime—there were, according to Professor Cross's article in the *Alumni Weekly* (February 21, 1913), more than a thousand volumes, 700 of which were of Fielding's own publications in various editions; of the collected works there were 33 editions, and of *Tom Jones* 81. Needless to say, Yale University became a Mecca for Fielding scholars, who, under the direction of Professor Cross and others, have made substantial contributions to the knowledge of his life and works. Mention can here be made only of two or three items that affect, closely or remotely, the rating of Fielding as a novelist. Professor J. E. Wells, improving upon a hint in Keightley, published in March, 1913, an article in which is carefully worked out the original political purpose of *Jonathan Wild*. Accordingly the book that to Fielding's enemies and detractors was occasioned by its author's acquaintance with scenes of “low profligacy” and his delight in the “vilest and most blasted depths of low life,” should be considered not only as containing the finest irony to be found in any writer in the language, with the possible exception of Swift (Cole-

⁶⁶ *Henry Fielding*, pp. 180-181, 186. For the magazine article on her findings, see Miss Godden's “Some Unpublished Letters and Records.”—*The Fortnightly Review*, XCII, 821-832 (November, 1909).

ridge, indeed, would make no exception), but as being in origin and intent so utterly removed from either the familiarity with or the desire to depict *low* scenes that it is, as a matter of fact, a powerful arraignment of the vices of that representative of *high* society, Sir Robert Walpole himself, the prime minister of England. Professor G. E. Jensen's publication (in 1915) of a critical edition of *The Covent-Garden Journal*, by furnishing for actual inspection and study an adequate body of Fielding's editorial writing, constitutes the best possible offset (if any were needed) to the celebrated caricature of Fielding in *Pendennis*. *The Covent-Garden Journal* admirably rounds out that portrait of Fielding as an earnest social reformer which appears not only in the pamphlets but in the novels.

For some years, then, the general attitude toward Fielding's works had been decidedly better; there was a manifest desire on the part of many persons competent in literature to believe in a different Fielding from the Fielding of tradition, and this desire had frequently expressed itself in positive assertion and in emphatic denial. As the result of this desire, a considerable number of new facts about the novelist had been gradually accumulating. In England, for example, the most notable contributions (from 1914 on) were those of Mr. J. Paul de Castro, who was subjecting the old Fielding anecdotes to careful scrutiny and was setting over against them the results of his research. One of the most important of his discoveries was that from 1744 to 1747, when in popular fancy the Fieldings were presumably to be found in a garret, they were, indeed, living in excellent quarters at Old Boswell Court, for with the "exception" of a Mr. Lane, "who had stables attached to his premises, no tenant lived in a more expensive house."⁶⁷ But the new facts which were being turned up sporadically were hidden away in the columns of periodicals, and the assertions of Fielding's well-wishers too often remained mere statements of opinion. It is not surprising that—tempted to

⁶⁷ *Notes and Queries*, 12 S., I, 264-265 (April 1, 1916).

employ (1909) a sparkling phrase—Sir Conan Doyle, who “inclines towards Richardson,” should revert to “Tom Newcome’s indignation” and characterize Fielding as a “rakehell wit of noble blood.”⁶⁸ It is somewhat more surprising that Professor Gerould in his introduction to a commendable collection of Fielding’s *Essays* (1905) should expatiate upon the “penalty for his misdeeds” which the novelist paid “in his art as well as in his life” by way of “dulled” “sensibilities” and “coarsened” “moral fiber”;⁶⁹ and that Mr. Harold Child, in his otherwise admirable article on Fielding in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (1913), should (presumably thinking of Leslie Stephen) declare that Fielding was “wholly in sympathy with the average morality of his time,” and that “he takes, quite comfortably, what would nowadays be considered a low view of human nature.”⁷⁰ But it is decidedly surprising that Austin Dobson, who had labored for a generation to secure the general approval of a better presentment of Fielding the Man, should declare as late as 1912 that Murphy’s “general estimate” was “well enough.”⁷¹ When Dobson, who in Lowell’s phrase had rescued the body of Fielding from the “swinish hoofs” of his detractors, could refer in this fashion to Arthur Murphy’s iniquitous performance we cannot wonder at the backslidings of those who pretended to no special knowledge in the matter. Obviously the only thing that could stabilize criticism was a new and authoritative biography of Fielding which should possess the confidence that Dobson lacked, which should incorporate in permanent form the results of modern research, which should extend inquiry into scores of matters never before investigated, and which

⁶⁸ Doyle’s *Through the Magic Door*, pp. 140, 150. Following Stevenson he finds no gentleman in *Tom Jones*.

⁶⁹ *Selected Essays of Henry Fielding*, edited by G. H. Gerould, n.d. [1905], Introduction.

⁷⁰ Harold Child’s “Fielding and Smollett,” in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Cambridge, 1913, X, 34.

⁷¹ “A New Dialogue of the Dead,” in *The National Review*, LX, 609-617.

should above all be soundly documented. Such was *The History of Henry Fielding* on which for several years Professor W. L. Cross of Yale University had been engaged, and which he brought out in three handsome volumes in 1918.

In the words of the new biographer, "Dobson's method was to tone down what Murphy said and to alter or suppress here and there a line that disfigured Fielding's character," the "outcome" being "a rather pale and lifeless personality quite in harmony with the ultra-refinement and sense of propriety which dominated English literature" at the time his biography "first appeared."⁷² To Cross, Murphy's "Essay"—rigorously questioned and constantly discredited—was no longer the major authority but a document to check with; the real Fielding he sought for in the record of that author's varied activities and in the impress that he made—so far as that could be ascertained—upon the men and women of his time. Not only did he conduct an exhaustive study of the great novels—the chapters on *Tom Jones* alone cover one hundred and twenty-three pages—but he gave particular attention to the "secondary works," which, in "their number, their scope, their character," he declares, "make absurd the dissipated Fielding of tradition"; they "are a monument to Fielding's energy and earnestness, which once established time cannot remove."⁷³

In the first place, there was Fielding the Dramatist. No previous biographer had worked out in comprehensive detail and set in their true light the plays of Fielding. From the beginning it had been the custom to dismiss his entire *théâtre* as—if not shockingly immoral—at least of little consequence, ill-conceived, written hastily on tobacco wrappers, and neither deserving nor securing the respect of either the reading public or of the careless author himself. But as Cross has shown, the "most laughable farces" of Fielding's youth, "his regular comedies, and his political satires, all had their moral or corrective inferences. He would drive from the stage ranting tragedy, pantomime, and the Italian opera; he would expose

⁷² Cross's *Fielding*, III, 250.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, I, ix.

social degenerates masquerading in fair forms; he would uncover all the devices and stratagems of the corrupt politician, whether of his own or of another party.”⁷⁴ Then there was Fielding the Journalist. The art of ridicule which Fielding “mastered as a playwright, became the essence of his social satire.” “In his later plays and in ‘The Champion,’ ” to go on with the quotation, “he literally raised the laugh of ‘a whole Kingdom’ against the Prime Minister, his associates in office, and his poet laureate. Subsequently he raised the laugh against the English Jacobites, against Foote and Dr. Hill and the tribe of Grub Street.”⁷⁵ From journalist to novelist was again a natural transition. Fielding’s aim being, as before, social satire, he arrived “at a true art of fiction” by the way of ridicule; and, as Cross observes, the “ridicule” which Fielding “put upon ‘Pamela’ is as fresh and potent now as it was in the days of George the Second; it excites the same laughter—not against a man, not wholly against one of his books, but against a portrayal of life which rarely perceives the real thing beneath convention, pretence, and hypocrisy.”⁷⁶ Then comes the crowning achievement, *Tom Jones*—still social satire—the “best example that English fiction affords of pure comedy” “sustained through hundreds of pages,” written “by a man become mature by reading, observation, and reflection,” whose mind, “resting firmly on his recollection of countless men and women of all ranks and degrees who had been a part of his own life,” disported itself “in banter and ridicule with the religions, philosophies, and social ideas of the age.” It was, in fact, “a summary” of that age “by a man who turned upon it the light of an extraordinary intelligence, who was besides infinitely wise and sagacious, and tolerant of human errors and follies where the heart remains true.” And indeed it was far more than this; for, as its keen-eyed author, who had seen the manners of many men, intended, it was “an epic of human nature,” set forth in a “style and a manner so sound and so

⁷⁴ Cross’s *Fielding*, III, 285-286.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 279.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 283.

impressive that age seems unable to abate the glory of the achievement."⁷⁷ Finally, in the most natural way possible, came *Amelia*, again an innovation, which, as Fielding declared, was intended "to expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public as private, which at present infest this country." In the words of Professor Cross, its author, viewing "the human wreckage, exposed to his view every day" in the courtroom, now wrote with a more subdued humor and directed all his energies toward curing "society of specific ills." The Fielding who wrote *Amelia* was Fielding the Magistrate, Fielding the Social Reformer: as his biographer says, "He would simplify court procedure; he would revise the penal code; he would infuse new life into the administration of the law; he would establish an efficient police; he would put an end to robbery and murder; he would mitigate the suffering of the poor. . . . From his court, from his pen, came the information on which were framed laws for the decrease of crime. To this one end he laboured day and night, sacrificing his health and finally his life. By an inevitable process the wit and humorist passed into the moralist and reformer."⁷⁸

This is the story, as we read it in Professor Cross's excellently written and admirably documented pages. The uneasiness which Austin Dobson experienced all his life regarding the two Fieldings is thus seen to be unwarranted; the author's works, as Cross has shown, "though they unroll in different patterns, were really all of a piece."⁷⁹ "His development under the stress of changing circumstance was perfectly natural and logical, like the development of a great character in a great novel."⁸⁰ Nothing truer than this was ever said of Fielding; and the truth is not that of assertion only—it is truth carefully buttressed by facts. Merely to enumerate those features of the biography which give particular delight to a lover of the novelist would be beyond the scope of the present ac-

⁷⁷ Cross's *Fielding*, III, 284-285.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 285, 286.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 274.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 285.

count. It is sufficient to say that because of these volumes the Murphy-Thackeray-Taine caricature, which has enjoyed such vitality and influence, should, in course of time, entirely disappear. How the story of Fielding's life was darkened by the "Shadow of Arthur Murphy" and by the traffics and discoveries of the defamers who followed him to the present day is here set forth at length for the first time. We may now take down forever the discredited but graphic cartoons of an ill-governed jester and roaring profligate and hang up in their stead the likeness which Professor Cross has painted.

We must conceive of Fielding as an able Man of Letters, who possessed one of the largest working libraries of his day, and who—as we see from the works he has left behind him, from his allusions and annotations—experienced a scholar's delight in arduous study even from his earlier years. We must conceive of him as a notable Social Reformer, who, as we read in the excellent chapter entitled "War against Robbery and Murder,"—by the side of which previous accounts are pale and inadequate,—deserves honorable mention as the worthy forerunner of the celebrated John Howard. We must conceive of him as a Supreme Novelist, who set the pattern for English fiction by insisting that the most enduring examples of the art are those which are grounded in the observed facts of life—witness the care that Fielding expended upon his masterpiece as revealed by Cross's chapter on "The Art of 'Tom Jones' "—and yet which, like the great "epic of human nature," transcend those facts and portray universal truth. As for Fielding's much-berated hero, it is instructive and gratifying to place beside one of Thackeray's outbursts against a Tom that was in great measure imaginary the following quiet paragraph by Professor Cross, written after he had viewed in its length and breadth the great ironist's life and total achievement: "The entire portrayal of Tom Jones is of course irony. It is the art of 'Jonathan Wild' and numberless comedies refined to a greater degree of subtlety. A boy, whose moral code is of necessity defective, is sent out into the world and receives a temporary smirch from the contact. But he quickly learns his

lesson and becomes in the end a most respectable country squire. Never does Fielding set the seal of his approval upon the boy's conduct as a whole. On the contrary, he condemns much of it."⁸¹ As we finish this chapter, we cannot help musing for a moment upon the superfluous trouble which Tom has always brought upon his literary father.

By 1918, when Cross's biography appeared, the critical world was better prepared to accept the modern view of Fielding's life than it had been at any previous time. Some murmurs of discontent there were on the part of those who objected to so thorough a "whitewashing," as they called it; but opposition on this score was distinctly less noticeable than in the days of Henley, fifteen years before. And whether recalcitrant or not in accepting the account of Fielding's career, most reviewers took occasion to pay their respects to his signal achievement as an author. Of the various articles it is unnecessary to speak at length; Edmund Gosse, Frederic Harrison, and other students of Fielding contributed *critiques*, but we need not dwell upon them. One of the main effects of the publication of Cross's compendious study of Fielding's varied activities has been an increasing tendency on the part of critics to regard Fielding not as a novelist merely but—as Henley always insisted, and rightly—a man of letters. Mr. Carl Van Doren, in an article for *The Nation*, went so far as to proclaim Fielding the *greatest* English man of letters. And, though this view will probably be regarded as extravagant, something of that enthusiasm with which it is supported is not uncommon in estimates of Fielding at the present day.⁸² We may quote as follows: "Certainly he [Fielding] was abundant, for he was a man of full blood and leaping energy from whom speech flowed amply and surely, bubbling with fun. Certainly he was spacious, for he was both the best scholar among English novelists and the author of 'Tom Jones,' the broadest picture of

⁸¹ Cross's *Fielding*, II, 219.

⁸² How different from Taine's account is the sane and modern estimate of Professor Cazamian.—Legouis and Cazamian, *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*, Paris, 1924.

English common life since Chaucer's 'Prologue.' Certainly he was wise, for he was apparently incapable of superstition, unacquainted with prejudice, intolerant toward nothing honest. Certainly he was resolute, for he performed his duties as magistrate against the heaviest odds and in his broken age, though his vitality was slipping, never once lost his will or courage. Certainly he was elevated, though here he has oftenest been challenged: he had a true, high eloquence in his prose, for all he commonly smiled at it; and he had, without any disposition to fly high, that detachment from the knots and snarls of life which is for the wisest men what a singing escape is for fiery poets."⁸³

As an instance of the continued and increasing academic interest in a Fielding who demands and richly repays careful study, mention should be made of Professor Aurélien Digeon of the Lycée Condorcet. After making some conjectures as to the part played by Sarah Fielding in keeping her brother and Richardson *au courant* with what each other was doing,⁸⁴ M. Digeon brought out, in 1923, two essays as separates: *Le Texte des Romans de Fielding* (in which, from an examination of the author's revisions, he declares that Fielding was "l'un des plus soigneux artistes qui aient écrit en anglais") and *Les Romans de Fielding*, a critical and appreciative study of some three hundred pages, devoted to the Four Great Books. In the latter monograph, Digeon discusses the different phases of the novelist's work: the "intellectual" *Jonathan Wild*, the "humorous" *Joseph Andrews*, the "comic" (in the Meredithian sense) *Tom Jones*, the "sentimental" *Amelia* (which he praises for its "artistic harmony"). In his opinion, Fielding as a psychologist, though less minute and sentimental, is not inferior to Richardson, whose *Lovelace* is a representation not of reality but of "sadisme." For a "copie à la fois minutieuse et sobre de la réalité" we must turn to the author's crowning glory, *Tom Jones*, which contains also "ironie en-

⁸³ The New York Nation (1923), CXVI, 659-660.

⁸⁴ *Revue Germanique*, 1920, pp. 209-219; for a paper on Sarah and her brother, see pp. 353-362.

velloppée mais impitoyable de la critique sociale, sympathie poignante pour le misérable qu'écrase la justice; enfin résonance comique." To M. Digeon, the modern English novel, that "roman domestique qu' interrompait ou accompagnait plus ou moins explicitement le commentaire humoristique de l'auteur," is the lineal descendant not of Richardson but of Henry Fielding.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ John Drinkwater writes: "Judged from the modern point of view, Richardson is a tiresome, mawkish sentimentalist." "If Richardson invented the English novel, Henry Fielding . . . gave it, for the first time, absolute literary distinction."—*The Outline of Literature*, New York, 1923.

CHAPTER XVIII

Fielding—Past and Present

THE record of Fielding's fame as a novelist, rich as it has proved to be in appreciation by individuals, is, take it all in all, a singular story of antagonisms and misconceptions. No other great English fiction-writer has been so often and so completely misjudged. There were the various political (and, before that, dramatic) enemies who, during the author's lifetime, identified him in turn with the reprehensible characters that he depicted in play and novel, and who endeavored to blacken his personal reputation by every art known to the journalism of that day; there were the almost fanatical adherents of Samuel Richardson, who accepted as gospel truth that pious gentleman's malignant insinuations regarding Fielding's depravity, both as man and writer, and there was Richardson himself, who "could not help telling" Sarah Fielding that because her brother's books were so "low" one would suspect he had been born in a "stable," and who stated with more positiveness than logic that the reason Tom Jones was made illegitimate was because the author's first wife was a bastard; there was the greatest literary and moral authority of the age, Dr. Samuel Johnson, who denounced Fielding as a "block-head" and a "barren rascal," while he praised his rival for having taught the passions to move at the command of virtue; there was the envious Smollett, who made out that Fielding was a plagiarist, sneered at him for marrying a "cook-maid," and libeled him as a "trading" justice; there was the spiteful Horace Walpole, who vilified Fielding's muse as a "bunter"—that is, a low prostitute, and who characterized the second Mrs. Fielding by means of a shorter and uglier word; there was Sir John Hawkins, who declared that Fielding had done more to corrupt the "rising generation" than any other writer, and who derisively stigmatized "goodness of heart" as the goodness of a horse or of a dog; there was Mrs. Barbauld, who, in the

six volumes she excerpted from Richardson's voluminous correspondence, was careful not to pass by much of the abuse of Fielding therein contained, and who (with her brother, who spoke first) informed nineteenth-century readers—getting her data from Richardson—that Fielding's mind had received a "taint" which spread itself in his books; there was Walter Scott, who adapted the Aikin-Barbauld accusation and placed it for all time in his *Lives of the Novelists*, and there were the followers of Sir Walter, who declared that historical romance belonged to a higher *genre* of fiction than that of *Tom Jones*; there was Thackeray, who, despite his discipleship, believed the Aikin-Barbauld-Scott impeachment that this "humourist's" books were "blunted" by their author's life, and who pictured that author as a profligate, a "wild Tom Jones," a bibulous Mohock, rattling the shutters of his timid tea-drinking rival, and there were the followers of Thackeray, who indulged in a perfect orgy of wild imaginings concerning this "sad scamp," this "remorseful" rake, this "squanderer of thousands"; there was the fanatical Gilfillan, who characterized *Tom Jones* as a "palace built of dung," and there was the hardly less fanatical Ruskin, who depicted its creator as a dog "gloating" over "ordure"; there was H. A. Taine, who conceived of Fielding as a thick-skinned brawler, roaring through his books with a "broken head and a bellyful," and there were the great Frenchman's numerous proselytes, who inferred very naturally that such a mad wag could never have written with any care, or seriousness, or acumen; there were those, early and late, who regarded *Jonathan Wild* as founded upon the author's own experience in the "most blasted depths of low life,"¹ and there were those who pictured the novelist as an evil genius who desired to make his readers as "wicked and miserable" as himself; there were those who thought of him as the mere photographer of a brutal and degenerate age, and there were those who complained that he was too much the "preacher," too much the "doctrinaire"; there were those to whom his

¹ Green, Thomas, *Extracts from the Diary of a Lover of Literature*, Ipswich, 1810, pp. 192, 198-199.

stories were as remote from the truth as "fairy treasures," and there were those who asserted that his "homespun" mind was decidedly unimaginative—limited to mere "observation" and "common sense"; there were those who complained that *Tom Jones* was devoid of art—a mere "hastily gathered bundle," the huge "stock-pot" of a "Gargantuan entertainer," and there were those who sniffed at the novel as *too* artistic—a mere "trickster's perfection," a "toylike" world. Only a writer of sterling quality, of exceptional value to mankind, could have come safely through to us, overpowering the recalcitrancy of so many who at first stood out against him; kindling the enthusiasm of so many supreme minds—particularly those of the makers of literature; and exercising so far-reaching a dominion over his successors in a craft of which he may fairly be termed the first really modern representative.

To begin at the beginning, Fielding, a struggling young lawyer of thirty-five, with a long dramatic and newer journalistic reputation which had brought him considerable public notice, indeed, but many bitter enemies, had won a popular success with *Joseph Andrews*—not a signal triumph like that of *Pamela*, the book it parodied, not the undoubted approbation of those distinguished in the world of literature, but vogue enough to aid him in disposing of three volumes of *Miscellanies* and to introduce the character of Parson Adams into common talk. Seven years later, Fielding the magistrate scored a palpable hit with *Tom Jones*; so unmistakable, in fact, was the burst of applause with which the novel was received by the great reading public that his enemies old and new resorted to violent measures to undermine and destroy the reputation of both the book and its author. The record of vituperation on the part of *Old England* and other calumniators, which we have transcribed, would be difficult to match in the case of any other novelist, while such a voluminous and scurrilous production as the *Examen of Tom Jones* is *facile princeps* in its class. Walpole's unsavory and libelous picture of the Fieldings at home, Smollett's foul stroke in *Peregrine Pickle*, and the aspersions which Richardson sent broadcast among his adorers

—all testify to the “unaccountable success” which the “spurious brat” had met with. Were further evidence necessary, the imitations that followed in the train of this novel and the widespread custom of trading upon the author’s name by means of allusion would alone be sufficient to establish the point. And yet, despite all this popularity, the singular fact remains that of commendatory *dicta* from those whom we regard as the literary celebrities of the age there were extraordinarily few. It was Richardson, not Fielding, who had won the approval of most contemporary literary and moral authorities.

Fielding’s vogue with the *public* was still so great, however, that two years later Millar, the bookseller, paid him, according to Wraxall, £800 for the much smaller novel *Amelia*, the initial sale of which was uncommonly promising. But Fielding was now doomed to undergo one of the bitterest disappointments of his career; for this time not only the literary world but the reading public as well soon turned a cold shoulder upon his efforts. The history of the English novel furnishes few stranger chapters than that which recounts the story of his slip about Amelia’s nose; of his battles with the forces of Grub Street; of the abusiveness of John Hill, Smollett, Thornton, Kenrick, and others; of the smirching of his heroine’s reputation; and, at length, of her literary father’s sweet-tempered and touching defense of this “favourite child.” But the book was done for past redemption—even the mention of Amelia’s name provoked a smile—not that the ill-fated nose was entirely to blame, but simply that in this instance the larger reading public, as well as the literary world, was little interested in Fielding’s new venture in the way of a more sober realism, and was strangely unconcerned about his efforts to reform the very real evils then infesting society. “Wretchedly low and dirty” was Richardson’s comment—which was reverberated among his coterie of worshipers; but others beside Fielding’s enemies utterly failed to understand the author’s purpose. All Lady Mary had to say was to allege certain resemblances between incidents in the novel and incidents in

her cousin's life, and then to express her wonderment at his obtuseness in not perceiving that Booth and Jones were "scoundrels." Lady Orrery, who wept copiously over Richardson's novels, branded Amelia a fool and the book on the whole as "tedious." The fact is that Fielding had spoken before his time; the self-complacent world of the 1750's was in no mood to be disciplined by England's first great reform novelist. Apropos of this point, it is interesting to observe: first, that *Amelia*, as revised by the author himself, did not again appear until 1762, when Murphy used it for the collected edition of Fielding's works; and secondly, that *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), in which Richardson journeyed farther and farther into the realm of quasi-elegance, was a tremendous success. When, after Fielding's death, his last narrative work, the *Voyage to Lisbon* (1755), was published, no one could imagine from the few and apologetic notices which appeared that a man so distinguished either as a magistrate or as a novelist had passed away. Since to Lady Mary the splendid service which Fielding rendered his country as a social reformer and which was immediately responsible for his untimely death could be contemptuously characterized as a more "nauseous" employment than conducting "nocturnal weddings," we cannot wonder that the reformatory purpose in all of his great novels made comparatively little impression upon his readers high or low, though the rank and file, as well as literary persons here and there, who consulted their own pleasure rather than the sentimental vogue, were unable to resist his pervasive humor and his gift in telling a story.

Thus the answer to the old riddle about the popularity of Fielding in his own day is as clear as it is singular. *Tom Jones* (and in a less degree *Joseph Andrews*) enjoyed a greater popular success than has always or perhaps even commonly been supposed; but it was a long time before either of these books succeeded in winning the unmistakable enthusiasm of the critical. And though it is true in general that fiction as a *genre* had not yet come into its kingdom, the fact is incontestable that Richardson had already succeeded in evoking the applause

from literary and moral authorities which was denied his rival. To count among his indefatigable propagandists Young (of the *Night Thoughts*) and Samuel Johnson; to number among his defenders Gray and Shenstone; to have a good word from such elegant gentlemen as Pope and Chesterfield; to enjoy the reputation in *England* of being almost fanatically eulogized across the water; to be praised by clergymen from curate to bishop; to be celebrated constantly in the verse of the day; to be known everywhere he went as having taught the passions to move at the command of virtue—*this* was fame, such fame as Fielding, notwithstanding the popularity of *Tom Jones* (and, eventually, of *Joseph Andrews*), never in his own lifetime was permitted to enjoy. And the explanation of it all is, that Richardson had from the beginning exactly hit the taste of the literary world both at home and abroad. "It is very modish to have a 'Pamela,'"² wrote, in 1743, la Chesnaye-Desbois; and nearly a quarter of a century later Walpole expressed (in more than one letter) his profound disgust that the two "favourites"³ then (1765) reigning in Paris were Richardson the novelist and Hume the historian. Think of the torrential weeping that followed the reading of one of Richardson's books. When, in a letter to that author, the Earl of Cork spoke of the "salt tears" that he and his lady had shed he was not indulging in a mere compliment; did he not declare to John Duncombe that "Mr. Richardson draws tears from every eye"?⁴ Surely this was the case at Aaron Hill's on that twenty-ninth of November, 1748, when—according to Hill himself—"all their Eyes" were "like a wet flower in April"; while in the Highmore family, on one occasion at least, an even graver condition prevailed; for, as Mrs. Barbauld tells us, the members of that household retired to separate apart-

² Jusserand, J. J., *Shakespeare in France*, London, 1899, p. 268; for the original, see Chesnaye-Desbois, *Lettres Amusantes et Critiques sur les Romans*, Paris, 1743.

³ See his letter to Lady Hervey, September 14, 1765; also a letter to George Selwyn, December 2, 1765.—Toynbee ed., VI, 295, 370.

⁴ J. Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, London, 1812, IV, 583 note.

ments that they might enjoy in private their several lacrimosities.⁵ Obviously this was a situation with which Fielding was powerless to cope; nothing but a change in the age itself—that age whose follies and evils he fruitlessly endeavored to correct—could bring him the distinguished praise which as yet he lacked.

Unlucky as Fielding was in life he was almost equally unfortunate in death; for he was cursed with an incompetent and irresponsible biographer. The pompous young Irishman Arthur Murphy, who settled in London only a few years before Fielding died, just in time to read all the venerable scurrility which regurgitated against the author of *Amelia* during the Newspaper War, knew practically nothing of his older friend's career except the barest outlines; and, apparently, too indolent and indifferent to secure the necessary information from John and Sarah Fielding, he filled up his narrative with dubious anecdotes which had lingered in the greenrooms and certain darker stories of improvidence and dissipation which malignant enemies, smarting under the lash of England's foremost living satirist, had fashioned out of their own imaginations or out of reprehensible characters and incidents taken from the plays and novels. Designed to exploit Murphy's knowledge of matters other than Fielding's life and to flatter such influential personages as Warburton and Hurd, the rhetorical "Essay" on the novelist's "Life and Genius," though it commends in a conventional way the obvious excellences of the great novels, treats of their author as a *mauvais sujet* over whose failings the magnanimous biographer will draw the friendly veil. This unfortunate account, notwithstanding demonstrable misstatement and perversity in biographical matters, was accepted practically without question for nearly a hundred years; but the story of how the "Shadow of Arthur Murphy" has obscured the pages of almost every sketch of Fielding's life from Murphy's day to our own has now been

⁵ Richardson's *Correspondence*, I, cxi. Jeremy Bentham writes that, as a child, he "wept for hours" over *Clarissa*.—*Works*, Edinburgh, 1843, X, 21.

so fully and definitively set forth in Professor Cross's volumes that a further relapse into the quagmire of conjecture and apocryphal anecdote would seem to be improbable. It is only fair to say, however, that Murphy's criticism of the novels is much less reprehensible than his biography of the man who wrote them. Of course no one who regards the *Voyage to Lisbon* as a sorry jest upon the "scaffold," or who, even in the interest of a rhetorical figure, conceives of the realistic and humanitarian *Amelia* as the exhibition of "genius beginning to fall into its decay" (how often has the idea been repeated since!) can have any adequate notion of the real Henry Fielding. In both these instances the critic obviously reflected the imperfect understanding of the novelist which still prevailed. But, though his stiff and pompous essay gives little idea of the radiant human comedy which it discusses, it deserves credit for recording at some length the more patent good qualities of *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*; never before had so much praise of these two novels appeared in any conspicuous place. It is a significant fact that in 1762 the only passage of commendation which Murphy himself could find to instance was a footnote by Warburton; extraordinary as the statement may seem, there was, apparently, up to the year 1762, very little that could be quoted as coming from an "authority."⁶ To understand Fielding's situation at this time more clearly, we have only to compare it with that of his fortunate rival, whose fame continued to be in the ascendant. What glowing tributes might have graced an essay on his "Life and Genius"! Had not Adam Smith added another star to Richardson's galaxy by declaring him (in so notable a treatise as the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759) a "much better instructor" than "Zeno, Chrisippus, or Epictetus"? And was not Diderot's celebrated *éloge* blazing like a comet in the literary sky? During the eight years since Fielding's death, though his fame had been traded upon by numerous fiction manufacturers and though

⁶ Had Lord Lyttelton written the part about Fielding in his *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760) *himself*, the obsequious Murphy would probably have included it.

well-known scenes and characters had been turned to profit in play and opera, he had not won as yet that scholarly recognition which had come to Richardson. The great question now was—as we see it in retrospect—How soon would he win it?

Had Murphy written in 1772 instead of 1762 he might have done somewhat better in the way of “elegant extracts” from the novelist’s admirers—but only *somewhat* better, for on the subject of Fielding the most distinguished writers were as yet strangely silent. There was, of course, the sincere and excellent tribute (1763) by poor Christopher Smart, who looked back upon his former benefactor with gratitude and understanding; and there was the concise and apposite sentence which the repentant or politic Smollett—who viewed the great novels with all the keenness of a rival—inserted in the “Continuation” (1766) to his *History*. Now that the old political antagonisms and private animosities were receding into the past, Fielding’s works could be judged on their own merits. Consequently during the ten years which followed Murphy’s “Essay” a change for the better became perceptible, though singularly few *dicta* of distinction had as yet made their way into the annals of criticism.

It was about the middle of the seventh decade that Fielding might be said to have won at last the praise of scholars. Though the names of Dr. John Ogilvie, James Beattie (except for his *Minstrel*), Lord Monboddo, and the Rev. Vicesimus Knox have long since faded from the roll of fame, in those days they were of repute, and they were the forerunners of others more illustrious. As early as 1770 Beattie had inserted a casual reference to Fielding in his famous “Essay on Truth”; while Ogilvie had been among the first to admit the novelist into sober treatises on rhetoric by giving him a place—unimportant as it might be—in his *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Nature, Characters, and Various Species of Composition* (1774). But the more important pioneering in this way was done in the year 1776 by Beattie’s *Essays* and Monboddo’s *Origin and Progress of Language*. Here were two very popular books—one written by the Professor of Moral Philosophy

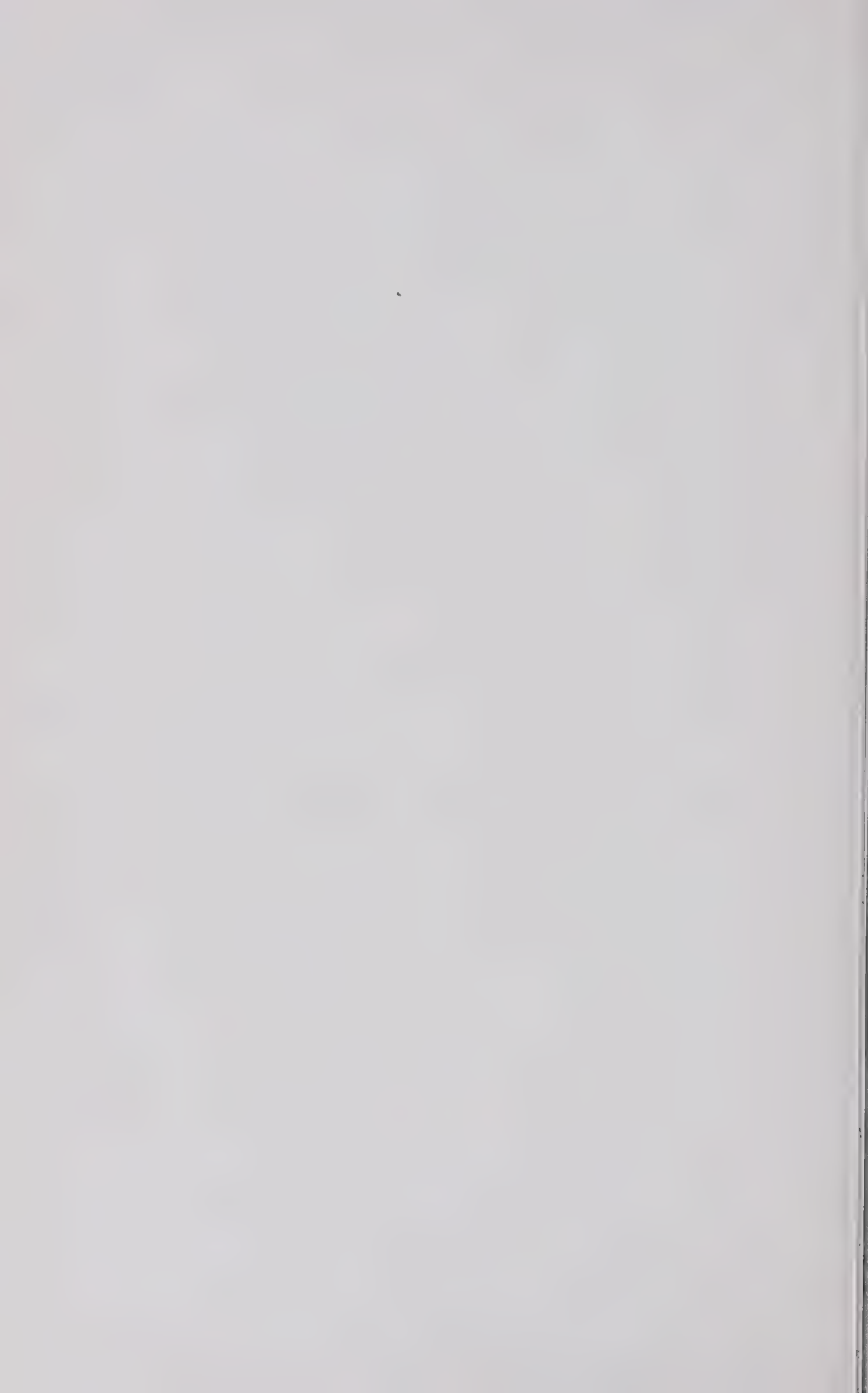
at Marischal College, Aberdeen; the other, by a well-known Scottish judge already celebrated for his extensive learning. Thus Fielding was beginning to receive something of that recognition—though very much less in degree—which had been bestowed upon Richardson almost from the first. Johnson might fulminate as he pleased against this “blockhead”; but even in the Burney circle he was far from having things his own way, while in the literary “Club” he was now encountering, presumably, frequent opposition. We may instance, for example: the elder Colman, who, owing much to Fielding, freely acknowledged his debt and often praised him; Sheridan, also indebted to him, who asserted that Richardson had no more spirit than a “drowned fly,” and—though he had little taste for realism—would set no other English novelist above the author of *Tom Jones*; Reynolds, who spoke of that great book as a “work of the highest merit”; and Garrick, who characterized Fielding as his “particular friend” and whose evident admiration is to be seen in the prologue to *The Fathers*; Fox, who quoted Fielding even from the chair of “The Club”; and, finally, Boswell himself, who could not “refrain from repeating” his “wonder at Johnson’s excessive and unaccountable depreciation of one of the best writers that England has produced.” Meanwhile, outside the circles of the learned and the literary, appreciation of Fielding during the last quarter of the century was expanding and deepening. The producer of fiction, the general hackwriter, the political lamponer relied upon him for many a telling passage and allusion. When the author of *The Letters of Junius* referred in 1771 to the “union of Blifil and Black George,” he was satisfied that his shaft would reach the mark; and equally confident some twenty years later was a writer in *The Rolliad* when he cast Mr. Pitt and Lord Thurlow for the parts of Blifil and the King of the Gypsies. From the popular dramatic adaptations in France, as well as from La Harpe’s famous praise; from the professed imitations of the novels in England, which found their best representative in Cumberland’s *Henry* (1795); and from the increasing number of editions

—both at home and abroad—during the last three decades of the century. It is evident that Fielding's sphere of influence was widening. As we read the glowing testimony of Lamb and Hazlitt we may visualize the delight with which *fin de siècle* readers turned to the popular editions (Cooke's pocket volumes, say, or Harrison's *Novelist's Library*), and gazed at the elegant plates by Southard or Corbould, or the extraordinary caricatures of Rowlandson. In the days of Crabbe, Burns, and Rogers the case of Fielding was very different from what it had been in those of Young, Gray, and Shenstone; not without significance is the fact that during one of the famous evenings at the home of Samuel Rogers the entire "company" agreed that *Tom Jones* (with *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*) was "unrivalled in that species of composition." This growing approbation was, however, for the most part, popular rather than authoritative; the example set by Beattie of writing often and at length of Fielding's novels was not followed by his more eminent successors. It is true that the praise of scholars, unabundant as it was, attained in one or two instances a high and enduring level. "Little did Swift imagine"—wrote Dr. Joseph Warton in the well-known footnote to his edition of *Pope* (1707)—and before many years this passage had become an established phrase in Fielding criticism. Still, it was Richardson, rather than Fielding, who was Warton's favorite; not only did he regard *Clarissa* as equaling (if not excelling) *Tom Jones* in "profound knowledge" of mankind,⁷ but he bracketed the madness of Clementina with that of Shakespeare's *Lear*. The only pronouncement of that century on Fielding which was on a par with Johnson's declaration concerning Richardson—that is, Gibbon's famous prediction in his *Autobiography* that *Tom Jones* would outlast "the imperial Eagle of the house of Austria"—was then considered so extravagant, apparently, that the reviewer for *The European Magazine*, who transcribed at length the passage about the "nobility of the Spencers," took care to excise from it the part

⁷ Warton's *Essay on . . . Pope*, London, 1782, II, 126.



TOM RESTORES SOPHIA'S POCKET-BOOK
(*Tom Jones*, Book XIII, Chapter XI)



regarding *Tom Jones* and its illustrious author. Years afterward, of course,—due particularly to Thackeray's exploitation of it,—Gibbon's celebrated praise became one of the shining tributes of all time; but not the least of Fielding's misfortunes was the circumstance that when at last recognition had come to him from one of the greatest scholars of the age, his distinguished admirer should be in many quarters a forbidden writer. So strong was this feeling that half a century later when Macaulay delivered his Copyright Speech (1841) he dared not advocate publicly the reprinting of the *Decline and Fall*. Richardson was very lucky in having as his eulogist Samuel Johnson instead of Edward Gibbon. To sum up—Fielding's general popularity at the end of the century was increasingly pervasive; and, though he was regarded as merely the foremost representative of comic romance while Richardson (despite the fact that *his* form of novel was going out of vogue) was still commonly held to be not only more moral but more profound, he was obtaining at last distinguished recognition.

For fifty years, then, Fielding's novels had purveyed delight and refreshment to great numbers of the reading public; in fact, never again could exactly the *same* reaction be experienced in a perusal of his narratives, for the scenes and characters were still so near his admirers that many a lucky hit which they enjoyed was eventually passed over with unseeing eyes. But to an appreciation of the actual greatness of Fielding this proximity to the author was to a considerable degree prohibitory; in the case of a laughing philosopher such as he was, time alone could furnish the right perspective. In 1898 Mr. Gosse laid particular stress upon Fielding's "enthusiasm for righteousness"; but in 1798, and especially in the preceding decades, such a phrase to the world in general—except for an enlightened critic here and there—would have seemed extravagant. *That* characterization belonged to Richardson. Had not Dr. Johnson said so? And had not the Doctor's pronouncement been echoed and reëchoed in books of every description, from Smollett's *History* and Fordyce's *Sermons* in the 'Sixties to the

third edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1797) which had just been published? Would not Fordyce and Smollett and Johnson himself have been nonplussed by the accounts of Richardson which appeared a century later in the writings of Stephen, Dobson, Lang, Henley, Gosse, Saintsbury, Raleigh, and Cross? Or to return somewhat nearer their own period, would they not have stared in amazement at Coleridge's celebrated *dictum* to the effect that Fielding was as wholesome as Richardson was unwholesome, and that even in *Clarissa* the mind of the reader was poisoned by continued doses of *tinct. lyttae*? Unquestionably a great change has taken place since the days when Richardson's "system of ethics" was spoken of as "sublime"; and in the light of this change we are better prepared to understand why in his own century Fielding was, as a rule, regarded not as a profound thinker, an enlightened censor and reformer, but rather as a "wit," a writer of "facetious memory."

And he *was* so regarded. Even some of his strongest defamers allowed him "wit," or, as they frequently styled it, "buffoonery." Cibber, it will be remembered, attacked him as a "broken wit," while the supercilious young Richard Hurd sneered at his "buffoonery"; Richardson declared that his rival's "genius" shone best in "low humour," and Walpole, allowing him "unimaginable wit," characterized his inspiration as nothing less than depraved. Lady Mary, who said little of her cousin's wisdom, applauded his humor, which, indeed, she thought she discovered also in *Roderick Random*; Lyttelton told James Beattie that Henry Fielding possessed more "wit and humour" than Pope and Swift together; Garrick, in his prologue, characterized the novelist as a "wit"; and Fanny Burney, having only space enough in her preface for the most prominent trait of each of her great predecessors, chose for Fielding his admirable "wit." Meanwhile, even from the beginning, the works of Richardson had been designated as "serious," "moral," "profound." It is true that the term "wit" then connoted more wisdom than it does now; but with the majority of readers the observation of Clara Reeve's Euphrasia

describes the situation exactly. In the opinion of that character Fielding should be rated below the *moral* Richardson, inasmuch as we "must consider wit only as a secondary merit."

So inveterate was the idea that Fielding was a mere entertainer that even in 1814, when Dunlop brought out his *History of Fiction*, the two venerable grand divisions of the novel, the "comic" of Fielding and the "serious" of Richardson, were still retained—a classification emphasized by Beattie, though it went back to the days of *Charlotte Summers*. Thinking mainly of his "wit" and "humour," Fielding's eighteenth-century readers neglected, for the most part, several of his characteristic works; they missed, therefore, a number of his most essential qualities. They missed his tenderness—for they held *Amelia* even in much lower esteem than *Joseph Andrews*. So wrote Mrs. Reeve in 1785; and the fact is a matter of record. There was no mention of the book in *The Companion to the Playhouse* (1764), nor in the 1797 edition of *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, nor did any of the characters of that novel find a place in Garrick's celebrated prologue in 1778. Even in 1810 room was made in Mrs. Barbauld's *British Novelists* for *Pompey the Little* and other nonentities while *Amelia* was intentionally debarred. Moreover, they missed his fortitude. The *Voyage to Lisbon*, for which contemporary magazines apologized and which Murphy utterly misconstrued, was practically ignored until Walter Scott in his *Life of Fielding* (1821) quoted the opening passage. Furthermore, they missed in great measure his style, particularly the full splendor of his irony. Only during the final years of the century, when it appeared in popular editions, did *Jonathan Wild* enter into its career of wider esteem—nor even then does it seem to have been a particular favorite. In other words, Fielding the Ironist was never, in this early period, adequately appreciated. And, except for individual admirers mentioned in these pages, he was seldom ranked (as at the end of the nineteenth century) among notable stylists. Even Beattie found in his writings too much pedantry and bombast; and Monboddo, lover as he was of the novelist, regarded his mock-heroics as an inexcusable

blemish. On the unhumorous Godwin, apparently, Fielding's wit, humor, and irony—all were lost; in place of the elegance he sought he found only a "hidebound sportiveness." The fastidious Belsham,⁸ in his enumeration of English writers who possessed style, discovered no place for Henry Fielding. Thus the appreciation of that author in the eighteenth century was in no slight degree imperfect; for no one can thoroughly understand him who neglects the tenderness of *Amelia*, the irony of *Jonathan Wild*, and the fortitude of the *Voyage to Lisbon*.

During the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century there were indications that the old struggle between Richardson and Fielding might terminate sooner than had been expected. Little hint of the change is to be observed in reference books; for, from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1797 to Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes* (1812), the author of *Clarissa* was ordinarily allowed by far the greater eminence. Eloquent passages concerning Richardson might be found in abundance; but tributes to Fielding were comparatively few and undistinguished. Moreover, Richardson's extraordinary prestige as a moralist was still practically unshaken; now that Wilberforce had added his influential testimony to that of Johnson, what more could be asked? In the columns of *The Christian Observer*, which from the beginning had declared itself opposed to fiction, Richardson, in most instances, escaped the ban. Still, notwithstanding the support of a powerful religious body, the position that he had maintained so long was now imperiled. On the other hand, Fielding's fortunes were manifestly brightening. The fact is—to go back a little in this history—that during the generation before *Waverley*—in the period bounded, say, by Mrs. Reeve's *Progress of Romance* (1785) and Dunlop's *History of Fiction* (1814)—prose narrative had been the subject of considerable controversy, as the result of which the old epistolary form, more and more regarded as cumbrous and antiquated, was being generally aban-

⁸ Belsham, William, *Essays*, London, 1789, I, 203 ff. ("On Style").

doned in practice and, as a rule, disparaged in theory. Though—except for Jane Austen—the contemporary novel was at low ebb, the ready sale which popular editions of the older novelists enjoyed testifies to the growing interest in fiction as an art. Better equipped with means for comparison, the readers of that day were now generally inclined to rate Fielding above Richardson as a constructive artist. So frequently was the superiority in this respect awarded *Tom Jones* rather than *Clarissa* that devoted Richardsonians were up in arms. At this juncture, Fielding's evil genius again did him a sorry turn; for in 1803, 1804, and 1818, respectively, the contemptuous allusions of Lady Mary and the slanders of Richardson and Walpole were started on their injurious mission. How John Aikin and Mrs. Barbauld endeavored to lower Fielding in the popular estimation by declaring (with Richardson) that his mind had received a "taint" from his life, and that this pernicious "taint" had spread itself in his works, need not be again repeated—nor how Watson and Mudford and other calumniators contributed their sinister quota to the cause by recording their misconceptions and vilifications in conspicuous and influential places. Thus the ill weeds that were to flourish later in the century were already getting a foothold. As yet, however, they could not prevail against Fielding's increasing reputation as a master of structure.

The greatest event in fiction since the days of Richardson and Fielding was the publication of *Waverley* in 1814; during nearly two decades thereafter, or as long as he lived, the great "Wizard of the North" kept under the spell of his romances the entire world of English readers. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that up to the time of Scott, Richardson and Fielding divided the world between them; but after the triumph of the "Scotch Novels" neither of the older writers ever regained his great reading public; from then on, their audience was made up for the most part of those literarily inclined. Richardson, however, was the harder hit; for in the light of *Waverley* such a work as *Clarissa* seemed more unwieldy than ever. With Fielding the case was very different;

even in the midst of the vogue of Scott he was generally regarded as the superior craftsman. Strange as it may seem, never before had his novels been so highly esteemed among competent critics as during the triumphant era of romance.

The golden words of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb (as well as those of Byron, Leigh Hunt, and many others) make the years between 1814 and 1832 a most enthusiastic period in Fielding criticism. While Jeffrey, Lockhart, and Wilson exalted Scott's romances above *Tom Jones* the three *greatest* critics continued to read their Fielding with as much enjoyment as ever and to sprinkle their essays, their letters, or the margins of the books themselves with admiring comment. All three were convinced of Fielding's wholesomeness; and all three, eventually, regarded him as second to no other novelist of his time. Very early in his career Lamb had used that famous phrase about the "heartly laugh" of *Tom Jones*, and his admiration increased with the years; Hazlitt, lover as he was of Richardson, made clear at the outset that it was Fielding who exhibited the more real and profound truths of human nature, and, if we may judge from the frequency of his references, he must have known the great books down to the minutest details; Coleridge, most influential of all, after a lifelong acquaintance with the author's works, and after a careful consideration in his latter years not only of *Tom Jones* but of *Jonathan Wild*, deliberately made his celebrated pronouncements on the healthfulness of Fielding (and the unhealthfulness of Richardson), on his wonderful irony, and on his supremacy as an artist. Finally, all three critics defended Fielding against that "senseless fastidiousness" into which the refinement of manners, toward the end of the second decade, was, in their opinion, degenerating. Celebrated as the *dicta* of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt eventually became, however, their influence was surprisingly tardy. It was what Scott said that gained the ear of the public, and Sir Walter had ill words for his predecessor as well as good. By proclaiming Fielding the "father of the English novel" he dealt a hard blow to the old antithesis between that "comic" author and his "serious"

rival; but by accepting the Aikin-Barbauld insinuation he did irreparable injury to Fielding's fame. Much as he admired him as a craftsman (for the plot of *Tom Jones* was his despair), he was in several ways incapacitated for rightly estimating the author's genius. Nor was his most obvious misconception—the one about the equality of Smollett and Fielding—his greatest error, an error due to his romantic predilections and to his Scottish patriotism. His prime mistake was in thinking of Fielding as a mere entertainer, whose novels were written hastily and without serious purpose—a misapprehension which accounts for his disparagement of *Jonathan Wild* and *Amelia*, and which powerfully deflected criticism from its right course in the years thereafter. Still it is true that even to greater critics than Scott—to Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt themselves—the difference in stature between Fielding and his contemporaries was not at all what it became at the end of the nineteenth century. Only after the struggle of a lifetime did Coleridge definitely renounce Richardson; only after several years of persuasion on the part of Hazlitt was Lamb convinced that Fielding was better than Smollett; while Hazlitt himself, enamored of Lovelace, never saw Richardson as he appeared to succeeding generations. In those days there were not enough excellent novels available to furnish a proper basis for comparison, and the wonder is that, in spite of the tremendous vogue of romance and romanticism, not only Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt, but Byron, Hunt, and Southey continued to admire Fielding as greatly as before. To appreciate the length and breadth of the novelist's achievement we must wait until later; for none of the three Great Critics was interested in the development of Fielding's genius or in his relationship to his times. But the pronouncements of this splendid period did more in the long run to establish the author's fame on a high and enduring level than those of preceding decades together. Except in the case of Gibbon, the most eulogistic passages available in the eighteenth century did not emanate from the most distinguished men of the age; they were the utterances of a Beattie, a Monboddo, or a Blair.

The situation had now been reversed. To be called by Scott the "father of the English novel" and by Byron the "prose Homer of human nature," to be praised by Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt (despite the fact that the influence of these writers had not yet come to its maturity), and to be admired by the many other notable men of letters whose opinions have been recorded in these pages, was fame indeed, even though the glory which now actually invested Fielding was as yet not fully perceived.

With the death of Scott and the great critics the golden period of praise was over. During the 'Thirties and the 'Forties the increasing affectation of gentility, which Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt had exclaimed against, told heavily against Fielding. Biographical ineptitudes, previously held in check, now grew in number, absurdity, and influence. Fresh gossip was retailed by Lady Stuart; and Roscoe, the compiler, drew an unfortunate comparison between Fielding and Burns. Furthermore, the romantic confusion of richness of material with richness of imagination, notwithstanding the protests of Dickens and Thackeray, now ran its course. Fielding's works, no longer read in the family circle, were commonly regarded as belonging to a *genre* decidedly inferior to that of Scott. Not until realism in fiction was better understood and appreciated could this erroneous notion be corrected. Among the early Victorians it became the fashion to disparage the eighteenth century *in toto*, and to arraign as one of the chief offenders of that age, the novelist Henry Fielding. The old stories of Murphy, Walpole, Richardson, and Lady Mary, which had been gathering accretions during the time of Scott, now furnished the basis for even wilder conjectures on the part of the literary journeymen of the 'Thirties and 'Forties. Nor was this low opinion of Fielding confined to writers of an inferior order. Carlyle, who had previously complained of the novelist's "loose morality," found no place for him among his "heroes" and stigmatized *Tom Jones* as "immeasurably less than a *Reality*." Young Ruskin, a devotee of Richardson, whose works had been read aloud to him in boyhood, complained of

the "open filth" of Fielding and visualized the author as "licking" his "chops" over "nastiness." Obviously a great change had come about since the days of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt. Of course Fielding had his defenders: individuals, here and there, as, for instance, Lewes and John Forster; occasional book-reviewers, who used his works as touchstones on which to try *Pickwick* and *Vanity Fair*; and, finally, the novelists themselves, Bulwer, Dickens, and Thackeray, each of whom raised a voice of protest against the "senseless fastidiousness" which the great critics of the previous generation had deprecated. But on the subject of Fielding the remarks of Bulwer, though at times very acute, were inconsistent; the allusions of Dickens were few and casual; and the only extended contribution which Thackeray had yet made, notwithstanding frequent incidental references, was a review of the novelist's works (the Roscoe volume) that was buried in the files of the *London Times*. Accepting Roscoe at face value and taking a hint or two from Scott, yet at the same time reading the novels with deep attention and with a view to his own profit, Thackeray in 1840 portrayed in one and the same article, without dreaming of reconciling them, two utterly different Fieldings—the Penitent Rake, that had held sway in the reference books, and the Supreme Artist, whom he genuinely admired. During the next ten years, while Thackeray amused himself, in many an allusion, with first one and then the other of these presentments, the fate of the great "master" hung in the balance of his disciple's whim.

Once again—this time with particularly disastrous consequences—luck turned against Fielding. While working on *Pendennis* (1850), Thackeray appreciated as never before the greatness of his predecessor as an artist, whose truth to life and whose "literary providence" he had marveled at in the *Times* article. Therefore it pleased him to complain that since "the author of *Tom Jones* was buried" writers of fiction had been compelled to "drape" their "MAN" and "give him a certain conventional simper." But in the new rôle of public lecturer in 1851 Thackeray could not resist the temptation to

elaborate the portrait of Fielding the Profligate, letting his imagination play about him and his reputed weaknesses as though he were a character he had himself invented. As an anonymous *Times* reviewer, Thackeray had admitted that Fielding's "errors" were doubtless "great" and that his "tastes" were "low"; but he had stoutly asserted that the "chief immorality" of that writer was simply that he called things "by their names" and that in his "honest, downright books" vice was never "mistaken for virtue." Eleven years later, secure in fame but eager to succeed as a lecturer, he threw himself into a spirited arraignment of his master as a dissipated fellow whose "art and ethics" were "blunted by his life." It is true that in one or two paragraphs of ringing eloquence he let his own heart speak out regarding those precious and noble qualities in Fielding which he had really perceived from the beginning. But though he posed as his champion and apologist, he could not "offer or hope" to make a "hero" out of such a bibulous wastrel as it now pleased him to represent.

To judge by the reports that have come down in literary history regarding the lecture, it is clear that the speaker had foretold precisely the temper of his audience. If anything it was thought that Thackeray, the professed follower of Fielding, had been much too lenient with him; though Charlotte Brontë may have been exceptionally violent in her denunciation of the author of *Tom Jones*, her outburst was only an exaggerated expression of an attitude which had become rather general. After the great Thackeray had spoken, the question of Fielding's character was practically settled for the next twenty years. Not only was the picture accepted by reviewers and compilers almost unanimously but even a professed investigator such as Lawrence (1855) was so impressed by it that, unable to draw the proper inferences from the new facts discovered, he concluded his task by referring his readers to the *English Humourists*. Thus assurance was made doubly sure, and the practice of inventing caricatures of a debauched Fielding was more in vogue than ever. When Thomas Keightley in his papers in *Fraser's Magazine* (1858) made the first

real step forward by exposing the ineptitudes of Lawrence and by endeavoring to retrieve the character of Tom Jones from popular misconception, his labor was apparently ineffectual. Certainly his findings were all lost on Thackeray himself, who, after his triumph with the *Humourists* at home and abroad, continued to make use of the Fielding of his fancy in subsequent novels and essays. The most notable instance in this way was Colonel Newcome's indictment of Tom Jones—a scene so powerfully depicted that it continued to leave its imprint on sober criticism far down the century; even after the appearance of Keightley's articles, Thackeray still clung to Walpole's representation of Fielding as a sponger. Of course there is another side to the Thackeray story, one which is sometimes neglected. In his books, his conversation, and his miscellaneous writings, Thackeray kept the name of his "brave old master" before the public; it was he who named the "Fielding" club, and so closely did he relate himself to his predecessor that ever since his day a discussion of Thackeray has ordinarily included a reference to the writer in whose footsteps he followed. His exploitation of *Amelia* gave the novel a higher standing than it had ever before enjoyed; and his eloquent passages on Fielding's art, together with his subordination of Richardson and Smollett, aided in establishing Fielding as the supreme novelist of the eighteenth century at a time when that century was commonly disparaged. Whatever fancy pictures Thackeray might draw of Fielding as a man, he bowed in reverence before him as an artist. True, his appreciation is not always perfect: no one who is in doubt about Jones and Blifil can rightly understand their *raison d'être*, though Thackeray's estimate might have been very different had he obtained his notion of Jones from the book rather than from his own imagination. But his high regard for Fielding as a master builder was always unshaken; and when a writer in *Blackwood's* (1860) attacked the art of *Tom Jones*, he administered the merited reproof in one of his "Roundabout Papers." No doubt it would have surprised him to see to what lengths his successors could go in using his remarks on Field-

ing's character to destroy that author's reputation as a writer; surely the biographical entanglements in which criticism soon found itself are almost unbelievable. If Fielding really was the rake and Mohock that Thackeray represented, it was easy to infer that his novels were hastily thrown together, that he wrote with no seriousness of purpose, and that his reprehensible scenes and characters were indications of his own depravity.

During the 'Sixties and the 'Seventies, such inferences continued to flourish, particularly after the appearance of Taine's brilliant discovery (the translation was in 1871), which presumably owed something to the *English Humourists*, that Fielding was not only a "drinker" and a "roysterer" but an "amiable buffalo." Had Keightley, the historian, seen fit to write the life of Fielding for which he is said to have made certain preparations, the reaction might not have had to wait, as it did, until Dobson's biography in 1883. But Keightley's project never came to fruition, and his excellent articles (1858) remained buried in the files of *Fraser's Magazine*. In the 'Seventies, however, while the followers of Thackeray and Taine went to the limit of absurdity, hints of change were in the air. In 1871, the same year in which the fanatical Forsyth pronounced his anathema against Fielding, calling upon the author of the *Humourists* as his witness, a new editor, the unknown Dr. Browne, made an excellent though ineffectual protest against Thackeray's unjust characterization of Tom and Sophia and against his singular assertion about Blifil and Jones. Even though his efforts were unavailing, it was something in those days to oppose great Thackeray. But the first breath of the freshening wind comes from a delightful page in *Middlemarch* (1871) in which a great woman novelist, scorning all qualifying phrases, had the boldness to proclaim Fielding one of the "colossi" of English literature, and to glory in the "lusty ease of his fine English." Nor was George Meredith thinking of a "wine-stained" prodigal or thick-skinned brawler when, in his essay "On the Idea of Comedy," he placed Fielding beside Molière and Cervantes and declared that the very "invocation" of these choice spirits was like a

"renovating air." Such references, however, though excellent, were brief and casual; the really important influence before Dobson, both for good and for ill, was that of Leslie Stephen. As the result of his studies in eighteenth-century thought, Stephen saw clearly (before he had to play the part of a biographer) that Fielding could have been no mere reckless Bohemian. Accordingly he elaborated, on several occasions, a substantial and intellectual personage whose writings abounded in "homespun" morality and "massive" "common sense." But, as a son-in-law of Thackeray, Stephen was too often disturbed by the thought of the indignant Colonel Newcome. Therefore he took pains to insist upon Fielding's limitations; and, though he filled his essays with excellent *dicta*, managed to convey the general idea that the kinship of the great Ironist was rather with Benjamin Franklin than with Cervantes and Molière. Meanwhile, neither Stephen nor anyone else had succeeded in sobering down the "mad wag" of popular fancy. When a professed critic such as G. P. Lathrop could declare that *Tom Jones* was a "hastily gathered bundle," and when a college professor—Sidney Lanier—could announce to his audience that he would "blot" that great book and its fellows from "the face of the earth," a change was assuredly in order. Since during the entire Victorian age the web of criticism had been perplexed by biographical considerations, nothing but a more trustworthy life of the novelist could straighten out the tangles.

The period of some forty years since the appearance of Dobson's *Fielding* is, in its general character, as different from the previous half century as sunlight from shadow—an era not only of increasing enlightenment regarding the man but also of increasing appreciation of his achievement. No mere accident is the fact that Dobson's *Life* in 1883 was only a short monograph, while Cross's biography in 1918 fills three large volumes; it is symbolic of the position that, in the past two decades, Fielding has succeeded in winning as a man of letters. During this period the difference in altitude between him and his noted contemporaries has grown so great that even

the advocates of Richardson and Smollett have usually conceded the fact; for example, Sir A. C. Doyle, who admitted in 1909 that in preferring Richardson he was "one in a hundred." The general inference is, then, that to the minds of critics of the past generation Fielding's art and thought have made a particular appeal.

Take, to begin with, the first half of the period—from Dobson (1883) to Henley (1903). During these twenty years, when, due to the efforts of his first competent biographer his reputation was considerably eased of the burden of scandal it had borne so long, Fielding suddenly found himself in a new and populous world of admirers—Dobson, Lowell, Henley, Saintsbury, Lang, and Gosse all came forward as his champions. Within the second decade four new editions of his *Works* enjoyed a ready sale. Leslie Stephen, as Professor Cross has said, had been the last of Fielding's "brilliant defamers"; the attitude of Saintsbury (1893), Gosse (1898), and Henley (1903) was one of vindication not only of the man but of the artist. All three editors spoke out boldly against Thackeray's caricature and against the resultant disparagement of Fielding's novels. To Thackeray, even in 1860, the Walpole story was a reflection on Fielding's character; to Mr. Gosse in 1898 it was a reflection on the eighteenth century.

Dobson's book represented two movements which have continued in favor ever since: the renaissance of interest in that century which Carlyle and Ruskin had excoriated, and the new desire for scientific, or accurate, biography. Furthermore, prose fiction, coming to be regarded as one of the grand divisions of literature, was receiving serious attention. Thus was brought about *genre*-study, as the result of which Fielding was seen to belong to a different class from that of Smollett, or from that of the French naturalists. Then, too, since literary criticism now found it necessary to take account of an author's development, students of Fielding were turning with interest and enjoyment to the *Voyage to Lisbon* and *Jonathan Wild*, and to those introductory passages in the three great novels in which the author discoursed upon his theory of prose

narrative. Dobson's discovery in the 'Nineties of the catalogue of Fielding's library became, accordingly, a fact which received considerable notice; had papers such as Keightley's appeared in 1898 instead of 1858 they would never have been so completely neglected. Again, inasmuch as *fin de siècle* critics were greatly interested in English prose style, Fielding suddenly achieved a considerable reputation as a stylist. Stevenson himself, who turned up his nose at *Tom Jones*, bracketed its author with Addison in his essay on "Style." Finally, when Henley issued his brilliant manifesto in 1903, a strong band of critics was fighting under Fielding's banner.

Since 1903 the history of the novelist's reputation is an account of the broadening and deepening of that better understanding of his achievement which began with Dobson in 1883. For the acceptance of the new view of Fielding several tendencies of the times have been most propitious: the dissipation of prudishness, the even more widespread study of fiction, and the vogue of modern realism. The change in the attitude of women toward Fielding is evidenced by Mrs. Craigie's recommendation concerning *Amelia* in 1904 and by Miss Godden's *Memoir* in 1910; and the high estimation in which Fielding was held at the time of his Bi-centenary (1907) by both men and women may be judged from the enthusiastic articles which appeared on that occasion. The novelist's works had now become the object of serious study on the part of scholars, to whom every new biographical or critical fact concerning him was an item of deep interest. It had long been obvious that it was necessary, in order to understand not only Fielding's character but his accomplishment, to make a thorough investigation of those works which in the days of Christopher North were summarily dismissed as rubbish and which even modern writers were inclined to neglect and disparage. Only in this way could be obtained a trustworthy view of his development. The value of this kind of study is amply proved in Fielding's case by the light which was thrown upon his career by Cross's admirable biography in 1918. In these volumes the fact was established beyond a

doubt that Fielding's life, instead of being divided into two violently contrasted periods—the period of the “inept ‘dramatic adventurer’ ” and the period of the “consummate novelist”—was a unified progress from the first production to the last, the consistent development of a social satirist.

Such is the story of the author's fame from *Joseph Andrews* down to our own day. After making due allowances for the celebrated *dicta* of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt, it is clear that Fielding's position as a great imaginative artist has been higher among critics of the past generation than ever before. This condition has mainly come about as the result of careful and extended investigation and comparison. And the greatest aid of all has been the gradual clearing of his name of the reproaches which envious and malicious contemporaries heaped upon it, and which modern writers have thoughtlessly and unjustly repeated. Of late years it has become more and more apparent that Fielding was a satirist and reformer who spoke before his time. Since he spoke laughingly, his profundity was not, in his own outwardly formal and elegant age, generally perceived; since he painted the nude he was accused of obscenity; since he attacked emptiness and corruption in all religions he was accused of irreligion; since he portrayed good-heartedness in the poor and censured its absence in the rich he was accused of “lowness” and injudicious “levelling”; since he dealt with universal truths in fictions of epic scope instead of spinning out the *minutiae* of sentimental analysis, he was accused of shallowness; since he paused from time to time to interpolate in his stories his humorous and wise and tolerant views on human life, he was accused of lack of seriousness. In the eighteenth century the attitude toward Fielding as a social reformer was very different from what it would be to-day. Lady Mary pitied her cousin because he managed to get no higher preferment than “raking in the lowest sinks of vice and misery.” In our day a magistrate who had achieved such a signal triumph over the forces of evil in the greatest city of England would be written up in every magazine in the land. And if, at the same time; that magistrate were the author of

a great novel such as *Tom Jones*, his death would have been regretted throughout the English-speaking world as a public calamity. In Fielding's own day comparatively little attention was paid by the most eminent judges of literature to his efforts as a social reformer either as a magistrate or as an ironic realist. It is a significant fact that irony has been a stumbling block in the path of many another writer beside Fielding, while English realism has been obliged to wait for its greater triumph until our own generation.

The wonder is that, notwithstanding the amount and variety of disparagement to which Fielding as a novelist has been subjected, his sterling qualities—particularly his insight into human nature—have withstood the showers of sentimentality, the fire-bath of romance, the scalpel of the psychological analyst, and the inquisition of the specialist in prose narrative. Historical and comparative criticism have only served to make us understand him better. While Richardson has fallen from his high estate, and Smollett has taken a step down, Fielding has been more and more highly regarded. Possibly when another wave of extreme sentimentalism or ultra-emotional romanticism sweeps over English literature the present estimate of Fielding will be temporarily lowered. But he has already weathered successfully such storms more than once; and the modern tendencies of liberalism in our view of human society, tolerance in religion, and realism and organic unity in art, which have widened the distance between him and his contemporaries, bid fair to "seat him sure" among the critics of the immediate future. And it may be predicted that with the historians of democratic thought the creator of Parson Adams will some day be accorded the place, notwithstanding his fear of government by the "mob," which in the opinion of Lord Byron had never been bestowed upon him. Moreover, to future historians of fiction Fielding's importance will presumably seem greater than it does now; for, though his direct imitators have rarely been distinguished for their number or their success, the *genres* of fiction which he has suggested and the minds to whom his work has appealed are seen on investi-

gation to be far more numerous than has generally been imagined.

Fielding is not a writer of idylls, but he has a passion for ideality—Parson Adams and Amelia are unspotted of the world; he is not a sordid and bitter “naturalist”—had he been so he would have contrived a different ending for the story of Captain Booth; he is not a careless person, for no careless person ever so earnestly applied himself as he did to documentation, revision, and literary engineering; he is not a mere entertainer, for neither in his comment nor in the handling of his materials does he ever lose sight of a happier and better state of human existence; he is not superficial, though he may not choose to exhibit all his processes; he is not slenderly equipped with learning, for we now know what books he possessed and how he used them; he is not a “slapdash” artist, for the theories which he so carefully evolved he embodied in a *Tom Jones*; he is not—great humorist as he is—merely the “jolly” fellow of popular fancy, for only a grave man (to use Hazlitt’s⁹ characterization) could have written in that style of unalloyed irony; he is not essentially a “picaresquer,” for his adventures are used in the service of a philosophy of life; he is not primarily a photographer of life, but rather its critic, who endeavored to correct by laughing satire the defects of the society in which he lived; he is not thick-skinned, for no thick-skinned person could describe the little family of Heartfreeds; or Amelia “more amiable than gay”; he is not a “reckless enjoyer,” for no reckless enjoyer ever supported physical suffering with such philosophic equanimity; he is not a mere doctrinaire, for his criticism of life is embodied in living characters who give artistic pleasure; he is not, as Scott and Thackeray would have it, a writer whose ethics have been blunted by his life, for the famous Lady Bellaston incident—disgusting to the author as well as to us—only served to emphasize by contrast his abhorrence of malignant hypocrisy.

One of the outstanding facts in this record of opinion is

⁹ Waller and Glover ed., IX, 243 *note*.

the large number of individual cases in which respect and admiration for the works of Fielding have deepened as the reader's familiarity with them and his acquaintance with the world itself have widened. Thomas Campbell, for example, admits that when he was a young man he had not a sufficient knowledge of life to appreciate the novelist. Charles Lamb, at first an adherent of Smollett, was "converted" by Hazlitt. Coleridge, who began as a Richardsonian, became, during his last years, one of the staunchest defenders that Fielding has ever had. A generation after the old familiar faces of his early friends were gone, Leigh Hunt read *Tom Jones* again with increased satisfaction. Only after much experience in life and in books did George Eliot write that glowing passage (in *Middlemarch*) about the lusty ease of Fielding's style. Turning back to *Tom Jones* at the age of eighty the creator of *Rab and his Friends* exclaimed, "What manliness! What a style!" So it has always been—and for a good reason; only after he has "seen the manners of many men" is a reader properly equipped to take Fielding's measure. Young people thoroughly enjoy *Gulliver's Travels*: captivated by the novelty of its characters and incidents, they neither suspect nor care about the wonderful irony of it all. In like manner, unthinking persons young and old, who have found in *Tom Jones* perfect entertainment, have been entirely oblivious to the author's splendid satiric purposes. Adequate appreciation of Fielding requires study; but, as experience proves, he wins the abiding and increasing affections of men. Indeed it may be said that the perspective furnished by several generations has been required to bring about more generally the truest assessment of the breadth and depth of such a book as *Tom Jones*, which, in the words of the French critic, is the "*résumé de toute une existence.*"

Nowadays we see more clearly than ever before that Fielding was no mere buffoon or wit but a great and serious man of letters (the very greatest really) of the period immediately preceding that of Johnson; a staunch reformer who set himself squarely against the mistaken points of view and corrupt

tendencies of his time; an author whose works have touched and kindled many of the ablest minds in English literature; a supreme ironist whose place is with Cervantes and Molière; a humorist of the kindly race of Chaucer; a conscious originator of that splendid New Species of Writing which combines in one vast artistic medium for the criticism of life the scope of the epic, the clairvoyant insight of comedy, and the ripe wisdom of the chorus-commentary: a novelist who is in the largest and truest sense not merely the Shakespeare of English fiction and the Aristotle of its critical principles but a supreme artist and philosophic realist whose work even after five generations entitles him by common consent to rank among the immortals; not only a great but a good man—abounding in vitality, tenderness, courage, and magnanimity; in forgetfulness of self, in regard for woman, in a desire for the happiness of others; in a belief in the goodness of human nature, and in an implicit faith in essential Christianity.

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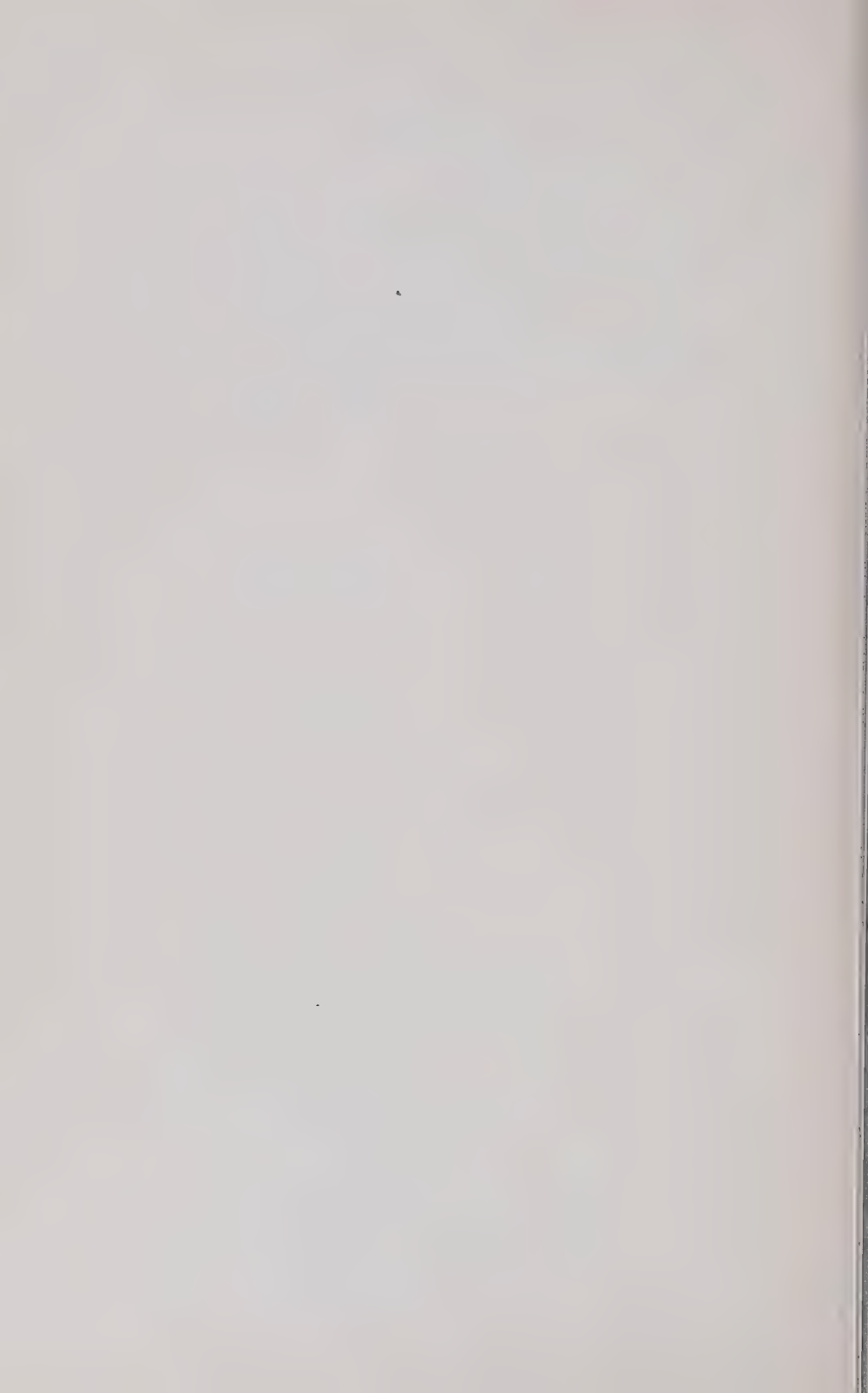
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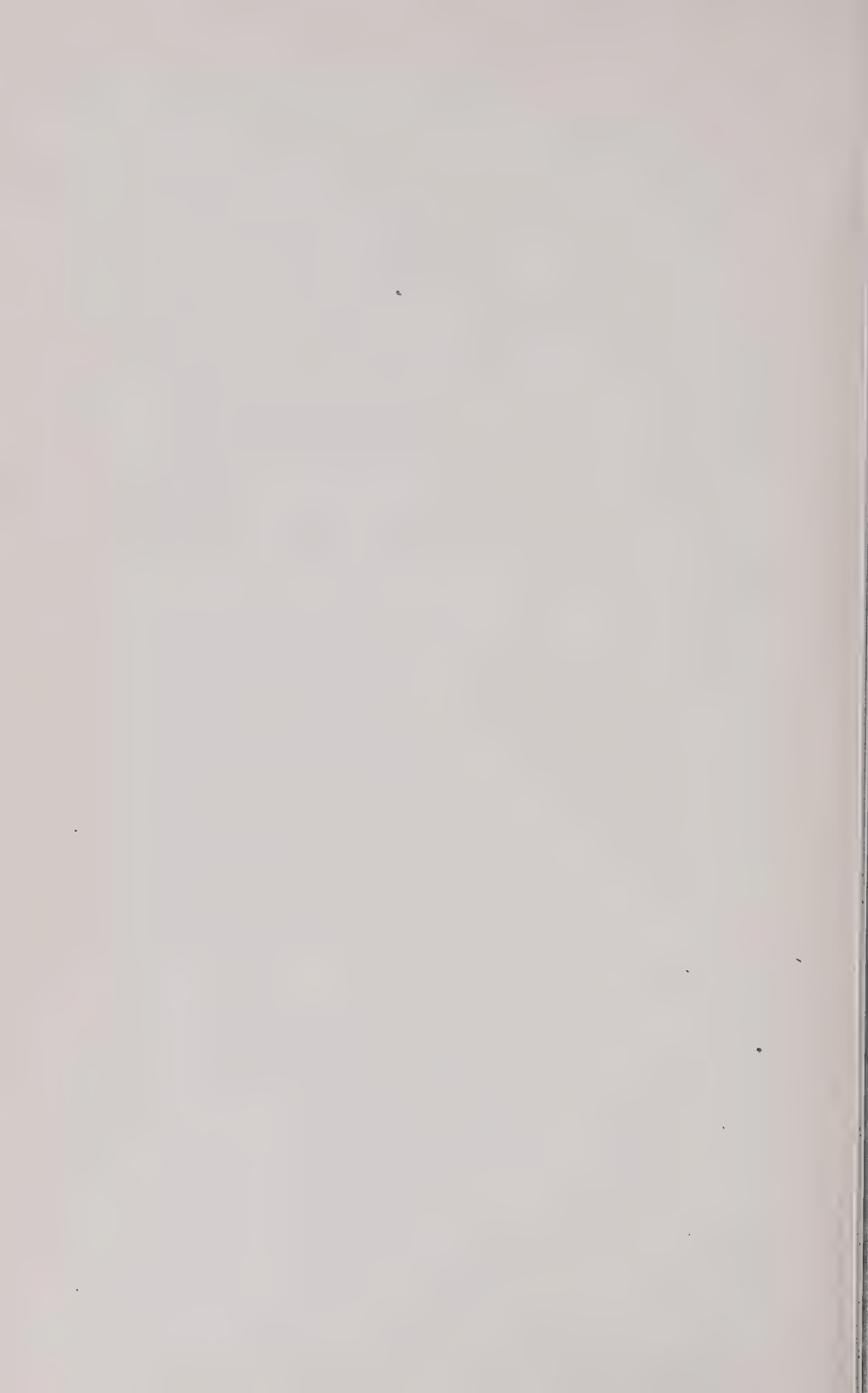
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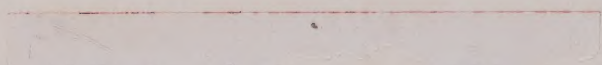
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